NATION

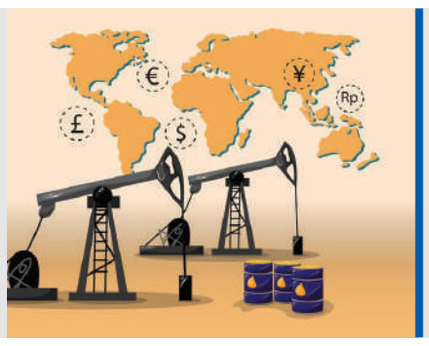
Bihar convict on parole shot dead by 5 men in ICU

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

US curbs on Russian oil won't hurt India: Puri

≫ Page: 7 ≪



SPORTS

Praggu forces Carlsen to resign, Chess great stunned

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Cleanest cities in India

The annual Swachh Survekshan awards, recognising India's cleanest cities, were announced on Thursday. Here are the key winners.

Indore ranked top clean city for 8th time

1st **Indore|** (8th consective win!)
2nd **Surat**
3rd **Navi Mumbai**

Cleanest cities with >10 lakh population

1st **Ahmedabad**
2nd **Bhopal**
3rd **Lucknow**

3-10 lakh population category

1st **Noida**
2nd **Chandigarh**
3rd **Mysuru**

Amarnath Yatra suspended from Jammu

JAMMU, 17 JULY

The Amarnath Yatra was suspended on Thursday due to heavy rain in the valley for the last 36 hours, officials said. A weather advisory warned of more heavy rain in parts of Jammu and Kashmir. This comes a day after a woman pilgrim died and three sustained injuries in a landslide along the Baltal route of the yatra in Ganderbal district. "Shri Amarnathji Yatra has been suspended for 17.07.2025 from both Pahalgam and Baltal base camps. Continuous heavy rains over the last two days have necessitated restoration work to be carried out on tracks along both routes," Kashmir Divisional Commissioner Vijay Kumar Bhiduri said. *—PTI*

MNS workers assault migrant over WhatsApp status

MUMBAI, 17 JULY

In a troubling incident, a shopkeeper in Vikhroli, Mumbai, was assaulted by workers from the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) after posting a WhatsApp status deemed offensive to the Marathi community. The victim, a Rajasthani shopkeeper, had shared a message boasting of Marwari superiority: Witnessed the power of a Rajasthani. No one can stand before us Marwaris. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Nimisha case: MEA in touch with Yemen authorities

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

India on Thursday said it is in touch with local authorities in Yemen as well as with certain friendly nations in finding a solution to the case of Nimisha Priya, an Indian nurse on death row. Priya's execution was scheduled for 16 July, but it was postponed. The nurse, hailing from Kollengode in Kerala's Palakkad district, has been found guilty of murdering a Yemeni citizen in July, 2017. "This is a sensitive matter and India has been offering all possible assistance in the case," EAM spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

Govt blames RCB for stampede, names Kohli in report

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

A government status report submitted to the High Court has blamed Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), their event management partner DNA Networks Pvt Ltd, and the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) for the tragic stampede at Chinnaswamy Stadium, which claimed 11 lives.

The report states the trio unilaterally organised RCB's June 4 victory parade and celebration without securing prior permission or providing required details to authorities. At 6.30 pm on the day of the IPL final between RCB and Punjab Kings (PBKS), KSCA, on behalf of DNA Networks, merely sent a letter of intimation, not a formal permission request—to Cubbon Park Police.

Due to insufficient details on crowd size, logistics, and control measures, the police denied permission. Despite this, RCB went ahead, announcing a public parade from Vidhana Soudha to Chinnaswamy Stadium via multiple social media posts starting at 7.01 am on June 4.

Further posts at 8 am and 8.55 am, including a video by Virat Kohli, confirmed plans to celebrate with fans that evening. A final post at 3.14 pm announced a 5.00 pm parade start and free stadium passes, too late, as massive crowds had already assembled.

The posts reached millions: 16 lakh, 4.26 lakh, 7.6 lakh, and 17 lakh views, respectively. Metro ridership spiked to 9.66 lakh from a daily average of six lakh. The report estimates over three lakh people gathered through various means, far exceeding safe capacity, resulting in the fatal stampede.

However, RCB strongly objected to this claim.

"It was the Deputy Chief Minister, DK Shivakumar, who had picked the team from the airport, and took them to the Vidhan Soudha, where announcements were made about the event at the stadium," RCB's advocate Sandesh Chouta told the court. *—PTI*

Wall Street Journal report blames pilots for AI crash

Report says flight commander switched off the fuel control

WASHINGTON DC, 17 JULY

In its report, Wall Street Journal said that that the Air India crash probe shifts focus to senior pilot and added that the Black Box recording indicates the flight captain switched off fuel flow to engines.

The newspaper cited people familiar with US officials' early assessment of evidence uncovered in the investigation into the crash, which killed 260 people.

"A black-box recording of dialogue between the flight's two pilots indicates it was the captain who turned off switches that controlled fuel flowing to the plane's two engines," WSJ reported, quoting sources familiar with the early findings.

WSJ also said that the cockpit voice recorder also captures the emotional state of the crew. According to the report, "The first officer expressed surprise and then panicked, while the captain seemed to remain calm."

The contrast between the two — "one experienced and composed, the other shocked and panicked" — is expected to be central in understanding cockpit decision-making.

Sources cited in the report added that preliminary details suggest it was the captain who moved the switches, a conclusion shared by US pilots and safety experts tracking the probe. The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) had earlier stated that one pilot asked the other why the switches were flipped, and was met with a denial, leaving identities unclear.

Crucially, the switches were flipped in rapid succession, one second apart, and were turned back on just 10 seconds later. Experts say the precision and timing raise doubts about the action being accidental.

The two pilots were Captain Sumeet Sabharwal (15,638 hours) and First Officer Clive Kunder (3,403 hours). AAIB has urged caution against drawing conclusions, emphasising that the investigation is ongoing. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

NEXT HEARING ON 22 JULY

SC 'not convinced' with K'taka HC's bail to Darshan

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

The Supreme Court on Thursday expressed strong reservations over the Karnataka High Court's decision to grant bail to Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa in the Renukaswamy murder case.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan stated it was "not at all convinced" by how the High Court exercised its discretion. "You must give good reasons why we should not interfere with the bail order," Justice Pardiwala told senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing Darshan.

The court questioned the portion of the High Court's order, which appeared to suggest a predisposition to grant bail. Sibal requested the court to review witness statements recorded by police and the judicial magistrate.

The bench, hearing the Karnataka government's plea against the high court's 13 December 2024 order, also asked senior advocate Siddharth Luthra to furnish any prior records of the accused by the next hearing on 22 July.

Darshan, actress Pavithra Gowda, and others are accused of abducting and torturing 33-year-old fan Renukaswamy, who allegedly sent obscene messages to Gowda. Police claim he was held in a shed in Bengaluru, tortured for three days in June 2024, and his body was found in a drain. Darshan was arrested on 11 June and initially lodged in Parappana Agrahara Jail. After a viral photo showed him relaxing with inmates, he was shifted to Ballari Central Jail. The high court had earlier granted him interim bail on medical grounds in October, followed by regular bail in December. *—PTI*

India flays NATO Chief's 'double standard' over Russia warning

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

India on Thursday firmly rejected NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte's warning of potential secondary sanctions over its continued trade with Russia, cautioning against "double standards" and defending its energy procurement as driven by national interest and market realities.

Rutte, speaking in Washington DC, had warned India, China, and Brazil that they could be hit "very hard" by secondary sanctions unless they reconsidered ties with Moscow. He urged the three countries to pressure Russian President Vladimir Putin into peace talks over Ukraine, warning of massive consequences otherwise.

In response, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said: "We are closely following developments. Securing our energy needs remains an overriding priority. We are guided by market availability and global conditions. We caution against any double standards on the matter."

India, China, and Brazil—key BRICS members—have remained major importers of Russian crude despite Western sanctions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Rutte's remarks coincided with a warning from former US President Donald Trump, who threatened "very severe tariffs" on Russia if a peace deal was not reached within 50 days. Trump also recently threatened BRICS nations with a 10 per cent tariff hike on exports to the US, along with tariffs for those aligning with "anti-American policies". *—PTI*

K'taka gives nod to nuclear plant

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

The Karnataka Cabinet granted in-principle approval for the establishment of a nuclear power plant in the state. It asked the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) to submit a report after carrying out a study on the location for the proposed nuclear power plant.

The Cabinet did not agree with three potential sites in Vijayapura, Raichur and Koppal district identified by NTPC to conduct preliminary studies.

The cabinet ap-proved several projects, including the North Karnataka tourist circuit worth Rs 166.22 crore and Lift Irri-gation project to fill 126 lakes in Kolar district and Chikkaballapur district. *—PTI*

SC asks Centre to hunt Russian woman who fled with child

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

The Supreme Court has directed the Centre to issue a Look Out Circular (LOC) against a Russian woman and her child amid a custody battle with her Indian husband. The court also ordered seizure of her passport and alerted immigration authorities to prevent her departure from India. The woman allegedly disappeared with the child on 7 July and was last seen entering the Russian Embassy with a diplomat. The court urged cooperation from the Russian Embassy and asked authorities to trace the child immediately. The matter will be heard again on 18 July. *—PTI*

Commit crimes, lose visa: US after Indian's arrest

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

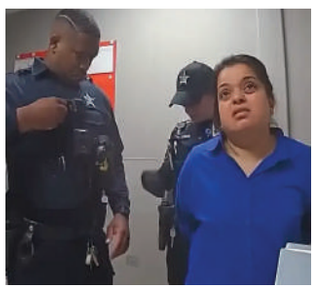
An Indian woman was held by the US police authorities in Walmart, after she allegedly tried to shoplift several items from the store in US.

The US embassy in India gave a stern warning stating that committing assault, theft or burglary in the US won't just cause legal issues but could also lead to a visa being revoked and make that person "ineligible" for future US visas.

The veracity of the video of the incident, widely shared on various social media platforms, could not be independently verified.

In a brief statement on Wednesday, the embassy also said America values law and order and expects foreign visitors to follow all US laws.

"Committing assault, theft, or burglary in the United States won't just cause you legal issues - it could lead to your visa being revoked and make you ineligible for future US visas. The US values law and order and expects foreign visitors to follow all US laws," the embassy said on X.



On 19 June, the embassy also said that a US visa is "a privilege, not a right", its screening does not stop after a visa has been issued and authorities might revoke it if one breaks the law. *—PTI*

'DISTORTING FACTS'

CM flags faulty auto-translation of Kannada on Meta apps

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah raised concerns over the faulty auto-translation of Kannada content on Meta platforms, warning that it is "distorting facts and misleading users". He said the issue is particularly concerning when it involves official communication and urged Meta to act swiftly.

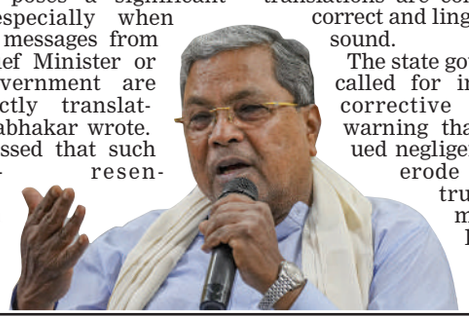
He added that social media platforms must act responsibly and cautioned citizens about inaccuracies in automated translations.

His media advisor, KV Prabhakar, formally wrote to Meta on 16 July, flagging "frequently inaccurate" and "grossly misleading" translations from Kannada to English on Facebook and Instagram. The letter stated that these flaws risk misinforming users, particularly when government messages are mistranslated.

"This poses a significant risk, especially when official messages from the Chief Minister or the government are incorrectly translated," Prabhakar wrote. He stressed that such misrepresentations from a constitutional authority were unacceptable.

On behalf of the CM, he urged Meta to temporarily suspend the auto-translation feature for Kannada until accuracy is improved and to work with qualified Kannada language experts to ensure translations are contextually correct and linguistically sound.

The state government called for immediate corrective action, warning that continued negligence could erode public trust and mislead lakhs of users. *—PTI*



B'desh says razed house has no link to Satyajit Ray

DHAKA, 17 JULY

Bangladesh on Thursday clarified that a house in Mymensingh, currently being demolished, has no association with legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray or his family. The response follows India's appeal to preserve the structure, believing it to be Ray's ancestral home and a symbol of shared cultural heritage.

India had offered assistance to conserve the building as a museum. However, Bangladesh's Foreign Ministry stated that archival and land records confirm the house never belonged to the Ray family. It was originally built by local zamindar Shashikant Acharya Chowdhury for his staff and later came under government control. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Mysuru celebrates Chamundeshwari Vardhanti

MYSURU, 17 JULY

Thousands of devotees on Thursday attended the Chamundeshwari Vardhanti atop the Chamundi Hills, even as the festival was celebrated across the city by the devotees who distributed prasadam to the public. The Vardhanti (birth day celebration) of the goddess was celebrated with traditional gaiety and religious fervour. All rituals of the celebrations, which started at 4am on Thursday, were led by chief priest Shashishekhar Deekshith. Following the 'Mahamangalarathi' at 8am at the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, where the members of the erstwhile royal family were present, the Utsava Murthy (procession deity) of the goddess was taken out in a procession in a gold palanquin. *—Salar News*

BMCRI ranked State's 2nd best medical college

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

Karnataka continues to shine in medical education, with several institutions ranked among the best in the country. In a recent India Today survey for 2024–25, Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMCRI) secured the second position among Karnataka's top ten medical colleges. Principal Secretary Mohammad Mohsin, Director of Medical Education Dr BL Sujatha Rathod, and BMCRI Dean Dr Ramesh Krishna hailed the ranking as a proud moment. The survey evaluated colleges on education quality, modern amenities, and infrastructure. Top colleges include: Kasturba Medical College, Manipal; BMCRI; St John's, Bengaluru; KMC, Mangaluru; Belagavi Medical College; SDM Dharwad and KS Hegde, Mangaluru. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Landslide on NH-75 halts Bengaluru to Mangaluru traffic

MANGALURU, 17 JULY

Continuous heavy rains in Dakshina Kannada district triggered a landslide on National Highway 75 near Kadaba taluk, bringing vehicular movement between Bengaluru and Mangaluru to a standstill. The landslide occurred near the Dharmasthala cross stretch of NH-75. The police have requested motorists to cooperate and follow diversions until the debris is cleared. "Efforts to clear the mud and restore traffic flow are underway," said Superintendent of Police Arun. While access from Bengaluru to Dharmasthala and Kukke Subrahmanya remains unaffected, vehicles proceeding from Mangaluru towards Bengaluru are being diverted due to the obstruction caused by the hillside collapse. Authorities have urged commuters to avoid non-essential travel along this corridor and to stay updated on weather and traffic advisories. The Public Works Department and National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) have deployed teams and machinery to expedite restoration efforts. Officials have also warned that further landslides are possible if rain persists. Travellers are asked to exercise caution while navigating hilly terrain in the Western Ghats. The NH-75 is a critical arterial route connecting coastal Karnataka to the hinterland, and the disruption is likely to impact both passenger travel and freight movement over the next few days, they said. Meanwhile, authorities declared a holiday for educational centres in multiple taluks of Dakshina Kannada district on Thursday. *—PTI*

X monitors us constantly, need to be alert: Centre tells HC

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

The Union government told the Karnataka High Court on Wednesday that constant surveillance by social media platforms, rising cybercrime, and emerging digital threats demand urgent regulatory action.

Appearing before Justice N Nagaprasanna in the ongoing X Corp (formerly Twitter) case, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta argued that internet intermediaries cannot claim constitutional rights akin to individuals. "X is simply a notice board. Only those posting content can claim Article 19 protections," he said, citing Shreya Singhal v Union of India, which upheld content regulation in the public interest.

X Corp is contesting the government's use of Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act to justify content takedown directives, arguing that only Section 69A and the IT Rules provide valid legal grounds. Mehta clarified that Section 79 offers "safe harbour" immunity, which is lost if intermediaries fail to act on government or court notices. "Section 79 is not a right, it is an exception," he stated.

Mehta highlighted that even smart TVs pose surveillance risks and that digital devices act as recorders, monitoring users constantly. He also flagged AI's dual nature, as both a technological boon and a threat, and stressed the need for evolving legal frameworks.

Citing a 401 per cent rise in cybercrime cases between 2019 (26,000 cases) and 2024 (22.6 lakh), Mehta called for a coordinated response involving platforms, regulators, and law enforcement.

He also pointed to "algorithmic amplification" by platforms, warning that curated content boosts engagement but raises concerns over intermediary neutrality.

The court will hear the case again on 18 July. *—PTI*

RCB ignored safety norms; did not pay for cops: Govt

Organisers failed to follow due process, causing 11 deaths

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

A government report submitted to the High Court states the RCB organisers ignored legal protocols and safety norms by holding the victory parade on 4 June without any formal police permission. The organisers failed to apply under the Licensing and Controlling of Assemblies and Processions (Bangalore City) Order, 2009, instead merely submitting an intimation.

Critical informationestimated crowd size, route, timing, organiser details, traffic and crowd management plans—was missing, preventing effective police preparation, the State said. The State held that Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB), DNA Networks Pvt Ltd, and the Karnataka State Cricket Association (KSCA) were responsible for the Chinnaswamy Stadium stampede.

The report highlighted the absence of loudspeakers, signage, trained staff, and any formal request for bandobast or loudspeaker usage **PHOTO: X**

The report highlighted the absence of loudspeakers, signage, trained staff, and any formal request for bandobast or loudspeaker usage. Organisers also did not pay the required police deployment fees under a Government Order dated 22 May, 2019. Despite no prior approvals, Bengaluru Police convened an emergency meeting at 10 am on 4 June and deployed 654 traffic personnel, including 4 DCPs, 6 ACPs, and 462 constables. The parade route, from HAL to Taj West End, Vidhana Soudha, and Chinnaswamy Stadium, was regulated. Traffic advisories were issued via press, social media, and FM radio. Nine diversion points, 125 barricades, and 11 barricading zones were made.

Local schools were asked to close early. BMTC's Sarathi teams and the E-Path app managed emergency response, with eight key sectors staffed by police. The report concluded that RCB, DNA Networks, and KSCA's disregard for procedures led to public safety violations. It also noted that their failure forced a reactive police response to a crowd already mobilised online. On 5 June, the government suspended five police officers, including the Commissioner of Police, for lapses in oversight. *—PTI*

MANY KILLED & BURIED

Dharmasthala: Govt assures fair probe

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

State Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Thursday said the state government is not protecting anybody in the Dharmasthala burial case, in which a witness is complaining of disappearances, unnatural deaths, and sexual assaults.

"There is no question of supporting or protecting anybody. We do not want to sensationalise the case, but we certainly want to pursue the truth. We want the truth to come out," said the Minister to reporters on Thursday.

On allegations that the accused are being "protected", the District In charge Minister of Dakshina Kannada said if there is evidence on the ground, and if the proof emerges, then strict action will be taken as per law.

"The Dakshina Kannada police have been told to get to the truth, no matter what."

He said the information that has been provided by the witness is "shocking".

Meanwhile, a group of lawyers, led by retired Supreme Court judge V Gopala Gowda, who had handed over a memorandum to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, urging him to form a Special Investigation Team for an impartial probe into the case, reiterated on Thursday their concern that the investigation in the case is not on the proper lines.

Gowda said the witness' statement has got evidentiary value at the time of conducting the trial. He said due to a delay, the public could only infer that there must be strong vested interest behind it. *—PTI*

Ranya gets 1-year jail without bail

BENGGALURU, 17 JULY

Kannada film actress Ranya Rao has been sentenced to one year's imprisonment under the stringent Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act (COFEPOSA) in connection with a major gold smuggling case.

The Advisory Board overseeing COFEPOSA matters ruled that Rao will not be granted bail for the entire duration of her preventive detention. This comes despite her being previously granted default bail on 20 May by a city court, along with co-accused Tarun Raju, after the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (failed to file a chargesheet in time.

The court had set bail at Rs 2 lakh with surety conditions. However, both Rao and Raju remained in custody due to the COFEPOSA order, which permits preventive detention for up to a year without formal charges if smuggling is suspected.

The case dates back to March, when Rao arrived from Dubai and attempted to use the green channel at Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru a route reserved for passengers with no dutiable goods. Her anxious demeanour prompted DRI officials to conduct a detailed search by female officers, leading to the discovery of 14.2 kg of gold worth approximately Rs 12.56 crore.

Her bail pleas were previously rejected twice by local courts and subsequently by the Karnataka High Court. *—PTI*

3 BANKS UNDER LENS

ED conducts raids in ₹100 crore Bengaluru bank 'cheating' case

ED attaches assets of Cong MLA

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday raided at least 15 locations in and around Bengaluru as part of a money laundering probe into a Rs 100 crore banking fraud involving over 15,000 depositors.

The investigation concerns three cooperative banks Shushruti Souhardha Bank, Shruthi Souharda Bank, and Shree Lakshmi Souharda Bank along with their promoters, including N Srinivas Murthy and his family, officials said.

The promoters allegedly lured depositors by offering unusually high interest rates, only to divert the funds through unsecured loans to associates.

Many of these loans turned into non-performing assets (NPAs). *—PTI*

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has provisionally attached assets worth Rs 1.32 crore belonging to Karnataka Congress MLA KY Nanjegowda in alleged irregularities in the 2023 recruitment process of the Kolar-Chikkaballapur District Cooperative Milk Producers Union Ltd (KOMUL).

Nanjegowda, who represents the Malur constituency and serves as KOMUL chairman, is accused of manipulating the recruitment process — comprising a written exam and interview—in exchange for money and political recommendations. The ED alleges that Nanjegowda, along with KOMUL MD K N Gopala Murthy and other directors, favoured less meritorious candidates while depriving deserving ones.

The ED began its probe after raids in January in a separate land allotment case. During the investigation, it seized tampered OMR sheets, WhatsApp messages forwarding candidate recommendations from politicians, and other incriminating documents. Evidence also pointed to procedural lapses at KOMUL and Mangalore University.

The agency claims that Rs 1.56 crore was generated as "proceeds of crime" by fixing written test scores and interview marks. *—PTI*

After slap gesture by CM, cop promoted as DCP

BELAGAVI, 17 JULY

Dharwad Additional Superintendent of Police Narayan Baramani, who took back his request for voluntary retirement from the services following a recent "humiliating act" by the Chief Minister, has been posted as Deputy Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) of Belagavi.

The officer had said that he and his family were subjected to humiliation after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah raised his hand at him at an event at Belagavi recently. He returned to the service after much convincing by ministers G Parameshwar and HK Patil and his senior colleagues.

Parameshwar said Bramani is being given a promotion. The minister said the CM did not intend to slap or insult the officer at the convention.

Reports had said that after a few women workers of the BJP waved black flags and shouted slogans when he was addressing the rally, an irked Siddaramaiah called Baramani toward him on the stage and made a gesture similar to slapping him. *—Salar News*

Bihar's free electricity promise is 'Karnataka model': DyCM

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

State Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said on Thursday that Bihar CM Nitish Kumar's promise of free electricity up to 125 units is a "Karnataka model".

Speaking to reporters, Shivakumar claimed that in the entire country, only the Congress party has stood for the welfare of the people. "After independence till today, whenever Congress party is in power, either in the Centre or in the state, it has given various schemes," he said.

He said it was State that started the trend with five guarantees. "But to come to power again, they (BJP) have also used this in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi and other parts of the country," he said.

Whatever Congress party has given in State, the entire country is following, he said. "So, it is a Karnataka model to the country."

Congress government's five guarantee schemes are 200 units of free power to all households, Rs 2,000 monthly assistance to the woman head of every family, additional 5 kg of rice to every member of a BPL household, Rs 3,000 every month for unemployed graduate youth and Rs 1,500 for diploma holders for two years and free travel for women. *—PTI*

> **RSS Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat has already signalled the political retirement of Narendra Modi, who is now 75. This is the BJP's golden chance to make a Dalit the next Prime Minister.**
>
> —Siddaramaiah, CM

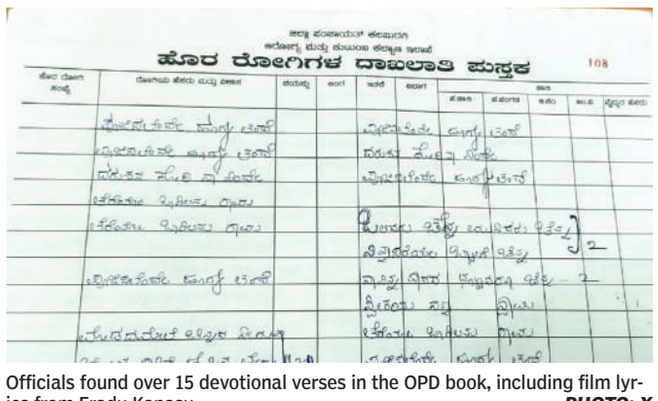
INVOKING THE DIVINE?

Hymns, songs in govt hospital's OPD register

KALABURAGI, 17 JUNE

Devotional songs and religious hymns were found written in the outpatient department (OPD) records book of the Government General Hospital in Jevargi, Kalaburagi district. The incident came to light during a surprise inspection by Lokayukta officials on Wednesday.

The visit followed the hospitalisation of students from Maradagi SA village who fell ill after consuming midday meals at their government school. Lokayukta SP Siddaraju and DySP Geeta Benal were checking on the children's condition when they uncovered the misuse of official hospital records.



Officials found over 15 devotional verses in the OPD book, including film lyrics from Eradu Kanasu **PHOTO: X**

Officials found over 15 devotional verses in the OPD book, including film lyrics from Eradu Kanasu such as "Poojisalende Hoogona Thande…", and religious lines like "Om Asya Shri Renuka Devy Ashtottarashata Namavali" and "Narayani Jaganmata Jagadbeeja Jagatprabha".

Shocked by the disorder, SP Siddaraju rebuked hospital staff, questioning how such mismanagement could occur in the constituency of former Chief Minister Dharam Singh. He sarcastically remarked the hospital deserved the title "Number One in Mismanagement" after observing similar chaos in the pharmacy, lab, AYUSH office, and staff rooms.

Patients also complained about prescriptions being issued on unofficial slips from outside the hospital.

District Health Officer Dr Sharanabasappa Kyatanal clarified that a staff member wrote the hymns while preparing for a World Population Day event. A notice and formal warning have been issued.—*Salar News*

'Lack of public spaces bigger issue than traffic'

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

As Alfonso Tagliaferri, the first Consul General of Italy posted in Bengaluru, concludes his tenure this week, he says the city's lack of public spaces not its notorious traffic vis its biggest drawback.

"For an Italian, a piazza is very important. It represents democracy," Tagliaferri told PTI, recalling time spent in Italian town squares chatting, reading or simply observing life. "In Bengaluru, hanging out is often a commercial activity. It's too privatised."

Despite that, he praised the city's warmth and its people's flexibility: "I arrived with many ideas, and most became reality. There's a spirit of 'let's do it' here."

Tagliaferri previously served in Chile, the Philippines, South Africa and Kolkata. He called Bengaluru a "perfect sounding board" for his ideas.

Over three years, with minimal staffing, he helped realise over 30 projects. A favourite was an exhibition highlighting Italy's space achievements. "Italy was the third country to launch a satellite after the US and USSR," he noted.

As he moves to Berlin, he leaves with a Wishlist: better pavements, more accessible public areas, and improved traffic management to match Bengaluru's vibrant potential. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

India, UK likely to sign trade pact next week

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

India and the UK are expected to sign the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) next week, a pact which aims to boost trade and investment between the two countries, an official said. The two countries announced the conclusion of the negotiations on 6 May. It will remove taxes on the export of labour-intensive products such as leather, footwear and clothing, while making imports of whisky and cars from Britain cheaper, in a bid to double trade between the two economies to USD 120 billion by 2030.—*PTI*

30 Cong MLAs suspended from Ch'garh Assembly

RAIPUR, 17 JULY

A tumultuous session in the Chhattisgarh legislative Assembly led to the suspension of 30 Congress members for a day on Thursday, after they protested the government's alleged failure to supply sufficient diammonium phosphate (DAP) fertiliser. The uproar erupted during a discussion on the issue, prompting the Speaker to adjourn the House twice. Congress MLA Umesh Patel questioned the Minister of Agriculture, Ramvichar Netam, regarding DAP demand and supply, highlighting a shortage. Speaker Raman Singh suspended the MLAs after Opposition members crowded the Well of the House, continuing to shout slogans despite requests to leave.—*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Kerala HC halts case against CM for 3 months

KOCHI, 17 JULY

The Kerala High Court has stayed proceedings for three months in a complaint seeking prosecution of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan over violence during 2023 'Nava Kerala Sadas' outreach programme. Justice VG Arun granted the stay on Vijayan's plea to quash complaint & a 3 July magisterial order. The complaint, filed by Ernakulam DCC President Muhammed Shiyas, alleged the CM's 20 November speech indirectly instigated political violence. Vijayan argued he merely praised bystanders for preventing protestors from getting hurt and did not encourage violence. He also claimed magistrate ignored police findings and acted without jurisdiction or sufficient evidence linking him to the incidents.—*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

Lalu moves SC in land-for-job scam case

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Former Bihar Chief Minister and RJD leader Lalu Prasad Yadav has moved the Supreme Court against the dismissal of his plea to stay trial court proceedings in the CBI's land-for-jobs case. A bench led by Justices MM Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh is expected to hear the matter on 18 July. The Delhi High Court had refused to stay proceedings on 29 May but issued notice to the CBI on Yadav's plea to quash the FIR and three chargesheets. The case concerns alleged railway jobs given in return for land transfers during Yadav's tenure as rail minister.—*PTI*

INDIAN PILOTS THREATEN TO SUE WSJ

Pilots accuse Western media of making 'pilot suicide' claims without evidence

MUMBAI, 17 JULY

The Federation of Indian Pilots (FIP) announced on Thursday that it intends to serve a legal notice to The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) over its report suggesting pilot error led to the crash of Air India flight AI-171.

FIP President Captain CS Randhawa strongly condemned the article, stating, "Nowhere in the report has it been mentioned that the fuel control switch was turned off due to pilot error. I condemn the article as baseless and we will take legal action." He also accused Western media of making such claims without evidence and urged restraint in speculating on the ongoing investigation.

Former DGCA Flight Operations Inspector, Capt. Prashant Dhalla, indicated possible cockpit confusion and a breakdown in Crew Resource Management (CRM) between pilots.

Aviation consultant Capt. Ehsan Khalid suggested a potential fault in the aircraft's stabiliser may have contributed to the crash. "During takeoff, the pilot focuses straight ahead. I have a problem with Boeing's design—it's the flying pilot who must turn off the stabiliser during a fault, not the other pilot," he said, adding that the first officer may have accidentally shut off the fuel instead of the stabiliser.

Federation of Indian Pilots President Captain CS Randhawa said that nowhere in the AAIB report has it been mentioned that the fuel control switch was turned off due to pilot error **PHOTOS: PTI**

- Flight AI-171, a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, crashed shortly after takeoff from Ahmedabad on 12 June, killing 241 passengers and 19 on the ground.

ALPA India (Air Line Pilots' Association – India) called for a transparent investigation, defending the crew's actions. "They deserve respect, not unfounded character judgments," the union stated.

Flight AI-171, a Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner, crashed shortly after takeoff from Ahmedabad on 12 June, killing 241 passengers and 19 on the ground. The aircraft had earlier reported a stabiliser fault, which was reportedly fixed by engineers prior to departure.

Capt. Khalid urged investigators to examine stabiliser input data from the flight recorder.

Meanwhile, aviation expert Sanjay Lazar raised concerns about the leak of investigation details in the United States, following the WSJ report. The investigation continues amid widespread calls for accuracy and respect. —*Agencies*

Nitish vows 125KW free power to woo voters

PATNA, 17 JULY

Ahead of the upcoming assembly polls, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has announced free power up to 125 units to all domestic consumers in the state.

Kumar came up with the announcement on social media on Thursday, promising it to 1.67 crore households from 1 August.

"This means that no charges will be levied for 125 units in the bills for July itself," said Kumar, adding, "We have already been providing cheap electricity to all consumers."

Notably, the longest-serving CM of the state has for long been a votary of "one nation, one tariff", claiming that under the present circumstances, Bihar was getting electricity from the grid at a high rate.

The CM has also also launched projects worth Rs 21,406.36 crore at the Thursday even under the Rural Works Department (RWD), marking a major step toward improving rural connectivity across the state.

The projects include the construction of 11,346 roads and 730 small bridges.

"It is worth noting that under the Rural Roads Strengthening and Management Programme, a new component, Mukhyamantri Gramin Sadak Unnayan Yojana, was launched in 2024. Under this programme, construction of 5,047 roads commenced on Thursday, with a total approved cost of Rs 6,198 crore. Additionally, foundation stones were laid for 4,079 roads, with a total approved cost of Rs 5,627 crore," the CMO said. —*PTI*

EC caught red-handed rigging polls for BJP: RaGa

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday claimed that the Election Commission has been caught "red handed" stealing votes in the name of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar.

"Election Commission in Bihar has been caught red-handed stealing votes in name of 'SIR'. Work - just theft but name is 'SIR' and FIR will be lodged against the one who exposes it. Is EC still 'Election Commission' or has it completely become BJP's 'Election Chori' branch?" he asked.

Tejashwi rejects EC's 35L Bihar voters claim

Meanwhile, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Thursday rubbished ECI's claim that more than 35 lakh voters were not found at their registered addresses across Bihar during ongoing SIR excercise.

He alleged that EC had become a "wing" (prakoshth) BJP at Centre & was running a "propaganda" based on PM's & Union Minister Shah's directions.

The Congress has attacked the SIR process, saying it is a "deliberate and diabolical" move to rig elections through large-scale disenfranchisement. —*PTI*

Paswan slams ally JD(U) over violent crimes

PATNA, 17 JULY

Union Minister Chirag Paswan has castigated the JD(U)-led Bihar government following a shocking incident in which a prisoner, released on medical parole, was shot dead by five unidentified assailants at a private hospital in Patna.

Paswan, who leads the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) and is part of the NDA coalition, expressed grave concerns over the deteriorating law and order situation in Bihar. In a Twitter statement, Paswan remarked, "Law and order in Bihar has become a serious concern. Murders occur every day, with the morale of criminals at an all-time high." He highlighted that the brazen attack within Paras Hospital serves as blatant challenge to law enforcement & governance.

This comes just ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bihar, even as the Assembly polls in State is fast approaching. Pointing out the polls, Paswan emphasised the urgency to implement stringent measures and restore order. The victim, Chandan Mishra, was admitted to hospital for treatment after his release from Beur Jail. CCTV footage revealed assailants entering his room. — *PTI*

ED files chargesheet against Vadra in land deal case

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday filed a charge sheet against Robert Vadra, the businessman husband of Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, in a money laundering case linked to alleged irregularities in a land deal in Haryana's Shikohpur, official sources said.

This is the first time that any probe agency has filed a prosecution complaint naming the 56-year-old Vadra in a criminal case.

The federal investigative agency, sources told PTI, has also attached 43 immovable properties worth Rs 37.64 crore pertaining to Vadra and his linked entities like Sky Light Hospitality Pvt Ltd and others.

Sources said the charge sheet has been before the Rouse Avenue court here under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

Vadra has always denied wrongdoing and has said the case was a "political vendetta" against him and his family that also comprises former Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi.

Vadra was questioned by the ED for three consecutive days in April as part of this probe. —*PTI*

- Vadra has always denied wrongdoing and has said the case was a "political vendetta" against him and his family that also comprises former Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi. Vadra was questioned by the ED for three consecutive days in April as part of this probe.

AKASH PRIME MISSILE

India has successfully test-fired the indigenously developed Akash Prime missile in Ladakh, customised to operate above 4,500 metres. The advanced variant of Akash Mark 1 and 1S destroyed two high-speed unmanned aerial targets in its first high-altitude trial. Equipped with a new indigenous radio frequency seeker, Akash Prime enhances terminal phase tracking and target destruction. With a 20km range, the test near the Line of Actual Control marks a key milestone in India's defence preparedness **PHOTO: PTI**

Uddhav-Fadnavis meet raises reunion speculations

MUMBAI, 17 JULY

In a light-hearted exchange, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis recently invited Uddhav Thackeray, leader of the Shiv Sena UBT, to consider rejoining ruling side. Their subsequent meeting took place in the office of Legislative Council Chairman Ram Shinde and lasted approximately 20 minutes.

Fadnavis's comments, made during a session of the Maharashtra Assembly, suggested there is "no scope" for BJP to transit into opposition until 2029. He remarked that Thackeray might contemplate joining the ruling party "in a different way."

The political climate in Maharashtra has been tumultuous since the BJP and Shiv Sena's 25-year alliance ended over a seat-sharing dispute in the 2014 Assembly elections. Following Uddhav's shift to an alliance with the Congress post-2019 elections, Fadnavis regained power through Eknath Shinde's revolt in 2022, splitting the Shiv Sena.

Uddhav Thackeray with Devendra Fadnavis **PHOTO: X/ ShivSena**

As Uddhav Thackeray intensifies his criticisms of the BJP and the Shinde government over educational policies, speculation about a reconciliation between the Thackeray cousins has grown. Recent collaborative appearances, including a joint event celebrating the reversal of controversial language policies in schools, signal a possible thaw. —*Agencies*

MNS staff assaults R'than man over WhatsApp status

MUMBAI, 17 JULY

In a troubling incident, a shopkeeper in Vikhroli, Mumbai, was assaulted by workers from the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) after posting a WhatsApp status deemed offensive to the Marathi community.

The victim, a Rajasthani shopkeeper, had shared a message boasting of Marwari superiority: "Dekh liya Rajasthani ka power. Hum Marwari hamare saamne kisi ki nahi chalti" (Witnessed the power of a Rajasthani. No one can stand before us Marwaris).

Eyewitness accounts and footage of the confrontation show MNS workers accosting the shopkeeper outside his store, slapping and verbally abusing him while demanding a public apology. —*Agencies*

'FOLLOW LAW & ORDER'

1,563 Indians deported from US in 2025: MEA

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

The Ministry of External Affairs on Thursday confirmed that approximately 1,563 Indian nationals have been deported from the United States since 20 January, 2025, the day Donald Trump assumed office as its resident for a second term.

"Since 20 January of this year, till yesterday, some 1563 Indian nationals have been deported from the United States so far. Most of these Indian nationals have come by commercial flight," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said during the weekly media briefing.

Responding to a query on the arrest of an Indian national in Washington on charges of possessing child pornography, Jaiswal said, "These are matters of law & order... We would endeavour to tell Indian people going abroad that they should abide by local laws, guidelines & regulations."

Reinforcing the same message in another case, he referred to reported arrest of an Indian tourist in US for allegedly shoplifting. Jaiswal reiterated the ministry's consistent advisory for Indian travellers. "...Our constant request to all our people who go abroad is that they should follow the law and order of that country, & create a good image of the country," he said.

Commenting on the ongoing discussions regarding an India-US trade deal, Jaiswal said, "This is a matter which is under discussion between the two sides. We will share when something is finalised." — *ANI*

Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal **PHOTO: ANI**

- Reinforcing the same message in another case, he referred to the reported arrest of an Indian tourist in the US for allegedly shoplifting.

M'rashtra Cong questions Spl Bill's passage

MUMBAI, 17 JULY

Maharashtra Minister Yogesh Kadam has claimed that while local Congress leaders support the contentious Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, the party's high command is opposed to it.

The bill, which targets unlawful activities of left-wing extremist groups, particularly "urban Naxals," was passed by the state legislature last week amid criticism for its potential to suppress dissent.

Kadam highlighted that senior Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar, backs the bill due to security concerns in his constituency. Despite this, Congress state unit Chief Harshwardhan Sapkal has demanded an explanation on why party did not formally oppose it during its passage. Reports indicate that while the Congress MLAs received directives on speaking against the bill, Wadettiwar was absent from the assembly discussions.

Additionally, Kadam accused the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) of politicising the Marathi language issue ahead of upcoming civic elections. —*PTI*

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

10 accidents at same spot on Pune road after repair

PUNE, 17 JULY

The road stretch from Dehu to Yelawadi in Maval taluka, Pune, has become a major concern after ten accidents were reported within three hours at the same location.

Fortunately, no fatalities occurred; however, several two-wheeler riders suffered injuries due to a muddy patch, as documented by CCTV footage. The road, marred by large potholes, poses a significant risk to daily commuters.

Authorities attempted a temporary fix by filling the potholes with soil. Ironically, this measure has exacerbated the situation, as recent rains have turned the soil into slippery mud, leading to further accidents. Locals are criticising the lack of proper maintenance and demanding immediate action to prevent potential tragedies. ***—Agencies***

SC reverses own order, grants boy's custody to mother

Child suffered from anxiety symptoms after being separated from mother

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

Reversing its own order, the Supreme Court (SC) handed over the custody of a 13-year-old to his mother after noting that the child developed anxiety after being separation from her.

The top court stated that a flexible approach that aligned with the child's best interests should be taken.

In August 2024, SC had upheld the Kerala High Court judgment granting the child's permanent custody to his father.

However, the mother filed a review petition, citing a psychologist's report that stated he displayed anxiety and was at risk of developing separation anxiety disorder.

The court said that intervention was needed to prevent the child's mental health from deteriorating further.

The court noted that child considered his father as a "stranger" and had not spent a single night with him. However, he viewed his mother as his primary caregiver and found her presence comforting.

The couple got married in 2011. Later they divorced by mutual consent in 2015, with the child staying with his mother and the father visiting him twice a month.

After the woman remarried and had another child, her ex-husband had no contact with the child for four years.

The SC said that a flexible approach alligning with a child's best interest should be taken while dealing wih custody cases ***PHOTO: PTI***

SC scolds woman over 'affair', gives bail to man in rape case

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

While giving protection from arrest to a man accused of raping a woman on the promise of marriage, the Supreme Court on Wednesday rapped the woman complainant, saying that she "committed a crime" by having an extramarital affair. The court warned her that she can be prosecuted for engaging in physical relationship with a man other than her husband while their marriage was in effect. The remarks came from a bench of Justices MM Sundresh and N Kotiswar Singh. ***—Agencies***

In 2019, the woman contacted him for his signature to take the child abroad as they were relocating to Malaysia.

The father approached a family court in Kerala, seeking his son's permanent custody. However, permanent custody was granted to the mother and letting her take the child abroad during holidays.

The father then approached the High Court, which granted him permanent custody of the child. The mother then approached the Supreme Court. ***—PTI***

'No fundamental right of Indians to adopt US child'

MUMBAI, 17 JULY

An Indian does not have the fundamental right to adopt a child of American nationality even from among relatives when the child is neither "in need of care and protection" nor in "conflict with law", the Bombay High Court has said.

The court refused an Indian couple's plea to adopt their relative's son, a US citizen by birth.

The child is neither a 'child in need of care and protection' nor a 'child in conflict with law' as per law.

The couple will have to complete necessary formalities of adopting the child as per American laws and proceed with the post-adoption procedure to bring the adopted child to India.

Born in the US in 2019, the boy has since been living with the couple in India. ***—PTI***

7 killed in car-bike collision in M'rashtra

NASHIK, 17 JULY

A devastating collision between a car and a motorcycle resulted in the deaths of seven individuals and left two others seriously injured in Maharashtra's Nashik district. The incident occurred late on Wednesday night, close to Dindori town. The police received an emergency alert at 11.57pm regarding the accident, which happened near a nursery on the Vani-Dindori road. Upon arrival at the scene, officers discovered both vehicles having fallen into a small canal adjacent to the road. The victims could not be saved, while the injured weretransported to nearby medical facilities. Emergency services carried out a rescue operation to assist those involved and to ensure safety in the area. ***—PTI***

Bihar convict on parole shot dead by 5 men in ICU

PATNA, 17 JULY

A murder convict out on parole, was shot dead by five gunmen inside the ICU of the paras Hospital in Bihar's Patna on Thursday.

The deceased, Chandan, a resident of Buxar, was convicted in a murder case. He was a prisoner at Beur Jail and had gone to the hospital for treatment on parole.

The Congress released a CCTV footage of the hospital showing the four assailants entering the ICU, shooting Chandan in broad daylight and rushing out.

The party slammed the Nitish Kumar government over lawlessness, terming it "Bihar's goon rule."

The man was admitted to the ICU of the hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries.

A case was registered and the police launched a manhunt to nab the accused.

Prima facie, it appears that old rivalry might be the reason behind the murder, police sources said.

Five armed men entering the ICU of the Paras Hospital in Patna before they shot a convict on parole undergoing treatment there ***PHOTO: X***

Independent Lok Sabha MP from Purnea, Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, also alleged that the shooting has completely exposed the Nitish Kumar government.

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav went to the hospital but was not allowed to enter the health facility by the security guards deployed there.

In another incident, a person was killed by some people outside his house in Patna's Shahpur locality on Thursday morning.

The deceased is Shubham alias Bunty. ***—PTI***

Agitators break the police barricade during a bandh called by several opposition parties over the death of a college student in Odisha, who had set herself on fire following alleged sexual harassment by a professor in her college in Balasore ***PHOTO: PTI***

Bandh over Odisha student's suicide hits normal life

BHUBANESWAR, 17 JULY

Normal life came to a halt across Odisha on Thursday as the Congress and seven other parties enforced a 12 hour bandh, protesting the death of a college student who set herself on fire after allegedly being denied justice in a sexual harassment case.

The bandh severely impacted transport and business, with roads in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, and other cities deserted. Train services were delayed due to protestors picketing on tracks. However, essential services, including hospitals, ambulances, and milk parlours, continued without disruption.

Operations at major industries such as Nalco, Rourkela Steel Plant, and Paradip Port remained unaffected. Fuel stations shut from 6am to 6pm as a precaution.

Congress leaders, including Bhakta Charan Das and Ajay Kumar Lallu, were detained near Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi's residence. Protesters demanded a judicial probe and the resignations of Majhi and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, calling the student's death an "institutional murder".Security was heightened, with drones and AI-enabled cameras monitoring key ares . ***—PTI***

Gangrape survivor takes exams

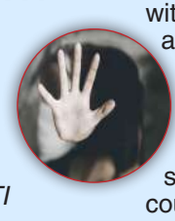
KOLKATA, 17 JULY

A first-year student of South Calcutta Law College, allegedly gang-raped on campus on 25 June by two seniors and an alumnus, bravely sat her semester exams three weeks later. Her father said she focused solely on studies despite the trauma, cooperating with investigators and the Women's Commission. Officials ensured her safety during exams. Her decision was hailed as courageous. ***—PTI***

Minor sexually assaulted in TN

CHENNAI, 17 JULY

A 10-year-old girl was allegedly abducted and sexually assaulted by an unidentified man in Gummidipoondi, Tamil Nadu, while walking home from school. The suspect, remains at large five days later. The girl is being treated. A case was registerd. ***—PTI***



Kerala student electrocuted at school; probe on

KOLLAM, 17 JULY

A 13-year-old boy tragically lost his life after receiving an electric shock on the premises of his school in Kollam district, Kerala. The victim, identified as Mithun, was a Class 8 student at Boys High School in Thevalakkara. The incident occurred when the boy attempted to retrieve a slipper that had fallen atop a cycle shed. Nearby, a low-hanging electric wire posed a hidden danger, and Mithun was electrocuted while reaching for his footwear. He died on the spot, with his body subsequently moved to a government hospital. General Education Minister V. Sivankutty instructed the Director of Public Instructions to conduct a thorough investigation and submit an urgent report. ***—PTI***

Actress molested; threatened with acid attack

KOLKATA, 17 JULY

Two persons have been arrested for allegedly molesting a television actress and threatening her with an acid attack in Jadavpur area of south Kolkata.The incident occurred on 16 July when the actress, on her way home, had stopped near Krishna glass factory along with four friends for tea. The accused, allegedly in an inebriated state, arrived in a car and started hurling obscene and vulgar abuses at her without any provocation. The actress was allegedly assaulted and the accused attempted to molest her, the complaint said. The accused have been arrested. The duo also filed a complaint alleging they were assaulted by the actress's friends. Investigations are underway. ***—PTI***

Evicted people clash with security forces in Assam

GOALPARA, 17 JULY

One person was killed and several others injured, including police officers, during a violent clash between evicted residents and security personnel in the Paikan Reserve Forest in Assam's Goalpara district on Thursday, officials confirmed.

According to authorities, forest guards and police came under attack from alleged encroachers armed with sticks and stones while attempting to cordon off a section of the forest. An eviction drive had been conducted in the area on 12 July.

"The forest department aimed to dig a channel to prevent future encroachments. The work proceeded peacefully yesterday, but when the team returned this morning, they were met with violent resistance," an official said.

In response to the attack, police opened fire to bring the situation under control. One person was killed and two others sustained injuries. Several security personnel were also hurt in the stone pelting.

Reports indicated that those involved in the violence were among the individuals displaced during last Saturday's eviction operation. ***—PTI***

Encroachers armed with sticks and stones, attacked forest guards and police personnel while they tried to cordon off a section of a reserve forest in Goalpara ***PHOTO: PTI***

Imphal-bound IndiGo plane returns to Delhi

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Two IndiGo flights departing from Delhi faced mid-air technical issues this week, prompting precautionary landings.

On 17 July, 2025, flight 6E 5118 bound for Imphal, operated by an Airbus A321, returned to Delhi after a minor technical snag was detected shortly after take-off. The aircraft was airborne for about an hour before safely landing at Indira Gandhi International Airport. Following mandatory checks, the aircraft resumed its journey. IndiGo issued a statement expressing regret for the inconvenience caused.

A more serious incident occurred on 16 July, when flight 6E 6271 from Delhi to Goa, suffered an engine failure mid-flight. The aircraft was diverted to Mumbai and an emergency declared. ***—PTI***

FAMILY REUNION

Shubhanshu adjusting well to life on Earth, says his father

LUCKNOW, 17 JULY

Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, the Indian astronaut who along with three others returned recently from a successful space mission, is in Houston in the US, as he readjusts to life on Earth, his father said on Thursday.

'Shux' as he is lovingly called, splashed down on Earth on 15 July after 18 days aboard the International Space Station (ISS).

His wife Kamna, and their six-year-old son, Kiash, are in Houston. Shukla and the three other astronauts will remain in quarantine until 23 July to complete medical and re-adaptation procedures.

After 24 July they will begin discussions with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Axiom and NASA.

"During our telephonic conversation, Shubhanshu appeared excited at the accomplishment that means so much for the country," Shambhu Dayal, Shukla's father.

His family Lucknow was overwhelmed by the public response to his achievement.

The excitement is equally palpable at Shukla's alma mater, City Montessori School (CMS), where preparations are underway to honour their star alumnus.

"….. holding my family… felt like home. Human spaceflight missions are magical….," Shubhanshu said on Instagram. Union Minister Jitendra Singh said the next Indian astronaut will travel in an indigenously built spacecraft. ISRO will launch its human spaceflight mission – Gaganyaan in 2027. ***—PTI***

Rains disrupt life across Kerala, R'than, J'khand

T'PURAM, 17 JULY

Incessant rainfall in Kerala has caused minor mudslides and flooding in the Kozhikode district, with severa rivers, including Korapuzha and Kuttiady, in spate amidst an orange alert for heavy rain in four districts.

Rajasthan faces significant disruptions due to heavy rainfall. Schools in Jharkhand's Palamu, Garhwa, and Latehar districts remained closed.

In Himachal Pradesh' Mandi, rescue operations were scaled back following cloudbursts and landslides that took 15 lives. While the search for the missing continues, officials are exploring ways to expedite relief for families affected by the disaster. Authorities are taking precautionary measures across all regions. ***—PTI***

Nivin Pauly, Abrid Shine booked for financial fraud

KOTTAYAM, 17 JULY

- Pauly and Shine entered a Rs 5 crore distribution deal with a Dubai firm, concealing the registration details

Malayalam actor Nivin Pauly and director Abrid Shine have been accused of financial fraud, following a complaint from PS Shamnas, a co-producer of Pauly's 2022 film 'Mahaveeryar'. An FIR was lodged on 16 July.

Shamnas claims that after 'Mahaveeryar' failed to perform commercially, Pauly promised to repay him Rs 95 lakh and proposed to include him as a partner in the upcoming film 'Action Hero Biju 2'. It is alleged that Shamnas invested around Rs 1.9 crore for the film, which was registered under his company, Indian Movie Makers. However, Pauly and Shine deceitfully entered a Rs 5 crore distribution deal with a Dubai firm, concealing the registra- tion details. ***—PTI***

WHERE IS THE STAGE?

A huge fire engulfed Tomorrowland festival's main stage in the town of Boom, north of Brussels, Belgium, just two days before the event was due to start. Almost 75% of the stage was destroyed and the fire was said to be spreading to the woodland. Tomorrowland is the world's largest annual electronic dance music festival which has been held in Belgium for 20 years. The festival with its spectacular staging and top artists draws at least 4 lakh people from all around the world. No one was injured
PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

China's actions worsen Indo-Pak water dispute

An aerial view of the Indus river amid the snow-capped area of Ladakh ***PHOTO: ANI***

For 65 years, the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) has seen the two South Asian rivals share access and use of the Indus Basin, a vast area covered by the Indus River and its tributaries that also stretches into Afghanistan and China.

For much of that history, there has been widespread praise for the agreement as a successful demonstration of cooperation between adversarial states over a key shared resource. But experts have noted the treaty has long held the potential for conflict. Drafters failed to factor in the effects of climate change, and the Himalayan glaciers that feed the rivers are now melting at record rates, ultimately putting at risk the long-term sustainability of water supply. Meanwhile, the ongoing conflict over Kashmir, where much of the basin is situated, puts cooperation at risk.

With treaty on ice, China steps in

That latest provocation threatening the treaty was a terrorist attack in the Indian union territory of J&K on 22 April, 2025. In response to that attack, which India blamed on Pakistan and precipitated a four-day confrontation, New Delhi temporarily suspended the treaty.

But even before that attack, India and Pakistan had been locked in negotiation over the future of the treaty – the status of which has been in the hands of international arbitrators since 2016. In the latest development, on 27 June, 2025, the Permanent Court of Arbitration issued a supplementary award in favor of Pakistan, arguing that India's holding of the treaty in abeyance did not affect its jurisdiction over the case. Moreover, the treaty does not allow for either party to unilaterally suspend the treaty, the ruling suggested.

Amid the wrangling over the treaty's future, Pakistan has turned to China for diplomatic and strategic support. Such support was evident during the conflict that took place following April's terrorist attack, during which Pakistan employed Chinese-made fighter jets & other military equipment against its neighbor.

Meanwhile, in an apparent move to counter India's suspension of the treaty, China and Pakistan have ramped up construction of a major dam project that would provide water supply and electricity to parts of Pakistan.

So, why is China getting involved? In part, it reflects the strong relationship between Pakistan and China, developed over six decades.

But as an expert in hydro politics, I believe Beijing's involvement raises concerns: China is not a neutral observer in the dispute. Rather, Beijing has long harbored a desire to increase its influence in the region and to counter an India long seen as a rival.

Wrangling over waters

The IWT has already endured three armed conflicts between Pakistan and India, and until recently it served as an exemplar of how to forge a successful bilateral agreement between two rival neighbors.

Under the initial terms of the treaty, India was granted control over three eastern rivers the countries share – Ravi, Beas and Satluj – with an average annual flow of 40.4 billion cubic meters. Meanwhile, Pakistan was given access to almost 167.2 billion cubic meters of water from the western rivers – Indus, Jhelum and Chenab.

For Pakistan, the terms of the division of IWT are painful because they concretized unresolved land disputes tied to partition of India in 1947. In particular, the division of the rivers is framed within the broader political context of Kashmir. The instability of the Kashmir region – disputes around Line of Control separating Indian- and Pakistan-controlled areas are common – underscores Pakistan's water vulnerability.

One-fifth of Pakistan's electricity comes from hydropower, and nearly 21 hydroelectric power plants are located in the Indus Basin region.

Since Pakistan's economy relies heavily on agriculture and the water needed to maintain agricultural land, the fate of IWT is of the utmost importance to Pakistan's leaders.

Such conditions have driven Islamabad to be a willing partner with China in a bid to shore up its water supply.

China provides technical expertise and financial support to Pakistan for numerous hydropower projects in Pakistan. These projects play a significant role in addressing Pakistan's energy requirements and have been a key aspect of the transboundary water relationship between the two nations.

Using water as a weapon?

Chinese media narratives have framed India as the aggressor in the dispute, warning of the danger of using "water as a weapon" and noting that the source of the Indus River lies in China's Western Tibet region.

After the terrorist attack, China Foreign Minister Wang Yi reaffirmed China's support for Pakistan, showcasing the relationship as an "all-weather strategic" partnership and referring to Pakistan as an "ironclad friend."And in response to India's suspension of the treaty, China announced it was to accelerate work on the significant Mohmand hydropower project on the tributary of the Indus River in Pakistan.

Beijing's backing of Pakistan is largely motivated by a mix of economic and geopolitical interests, particularly in legitimizing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. But it comes at the cost of stirring up regional tensions.

As such, the alignment of Chinese and Pakistani interests in developing hydro projects can pose a further challenge to the stability of South Asia's water-sharing deals. *—The Conversation*

SALAR ساہر

Why drones, AI can't find lost flood victims quickly?

For search and rescue, AI is not more accurate than humans, but it is far faster.

Recent successes in applying computer vision and machine learning to drone imagery for rapidly determining building and road damage after hurricanes or shifting wildfire lines suggest that artificial intelligence could be valuable in searching for missing persons after a flood.

Machine learning systems typically take less than one second to scan a high-resolution image from a drone versus one to three minutes for a person. Plus, drones often produce more imagery to view than is humanly possible in the critical first hours of a search when survivors may still be alive.

Unfortunately, today's AI systems are not up to the task.

We are robotics reseachers who study the use of drones in disasters. Our experiences searching for victims of flooding and numerous other events show that current implementations of AI fall short.

However, the technology can play a role in searching for flood victims. The key is AI-human collaboration.

AI's potential

Searching for flood victims is a type of wilderness search and rescue that presents unique challenges. The goal for machine learning scientists is to rank which images have signs of victims and indicate where in those images search-and-rescue personnel should focus. If the responder sees signs of a victim, they pass the GPS location in the image to search teams in the field to check.

The ranking is done by a classifier, which is an algorithm that learns to identify similar instances of objects – cats, cars, trees – from training data in order to recognize those objects in new images.

For example, in a search-and-rescue context, a classifier would spot instances of human activity such as garbage or backpacks to pass to wilderness search-and-rescue teams, or even identify the missing person themselves.

A classifier is needed because of the sheer volume of imagery that drones can produce. For example, a single 20-minute flight can produce over 800 high-resolution images.

If a responder spends only 10 seconds looking at each image, it would take over 22 hours of effort.

The ideal solution is an AI system that scans the entire image, prioritises images that have the strongest signs of victims, and highlights the area of the image for a responder to inspect. It could also decide whether the location should be flagged for special attention by search-and-rescue crews.

Where AI falls short

While this seems to be a perfect opportunity for computer vision and machine learning, modern systems have a high error rate. If the system is programmed to overestimate the number of candidate locations in hopes of not missing any victims, it will likely produce too many false candidates.

That would mean overloading squinters or, worse, the search-and-rescue teams, which would have to navigate through debris and muck to check the candidate locations.

Developing computer vision and machine learning systems for finding flood victims is difficult for three reasons.

One is that while existing computer vision systems are certainly capable of identifying people visible in aerial imagery, the visual indicators of a flood victim are often very different compared with those for a lost hiker or fugitive. Flood victims are often obscured, camouflaged, entangled in debris or submerged in water. These visual challenges increase the possibility that existing classifiers will miss victims.

Second, machine learning requires training data, but there are no datasets of aerial imagery where humans are tangled in debris, covered in mud and not in normal postures. This lack also increases the possibility of errors in classification.

Third, many of the drone images often captured by searchers are oblique views, rather than looking straight down. This means the GPS location of a candidate area is not the same as the GPS location of the drone.

How AI can help

Fortunately, with humans and AI working together, search-and-rescue teams can successfully use existing systems to help narrow down and prioritise imagery for further inspection.

In the case of flooding, human remains may be tangled among vegetation and debris. Therefore, a system could identify clumps of debris big enough to contain remains.

A common search strategy is to identify the GPS locations of where flotsam has gathered, because victims may be part of these same deposits.

An AI classifier could find debris commonly associated with remains, such as artificial colours and construction debris with straight lines or 90-degree corners.

Responders find these signs as they systematically walk the riverbanks and flood plains, but a classifier could help prioritise areas in the first few hours and days, when there may be survivors, and later could confirm that teams didn't miss any areas of interest as they navigated the difficult landscape on foot. *—PTI*

Developing computer vision and machine learning systems for finding flood victims is difficult for three reasons – visiblity of people in aerial imagery, no datasets of humans on aerial imagery & drone images are often oblique views ***PHOTO: FREEPIK***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Trump calls Epstein files a 'hoax' and turns on MAGA 'weaklings'

US President Donald Trump is lashing out at his own supporters, accusing them of being duped by Democrats, as he tries to clamp down on criticism over his administration's handling of much-hyped records in the Jeffrey Epstein sex trafficking investigation, which Trump now calls a "hoax".

"Their new SCAM is what we will forever call the Jeffrey Epstein Hoax, and my PAST supporters have bought into this "bull——," hook, line, and sinker," Trump wrote Wednesday on his Truth Social site, using an expletive in his post. "They haven't learned their lesson, and probably never will, even after being conned by the Lunatic Left for 8 long years."

"Let these weaklings continue forward and do the Democrats work, don't even think about talking of our incredible and unprecedented success, because I don't want their support anymore! Thank you for your attention to this matter," he went on.

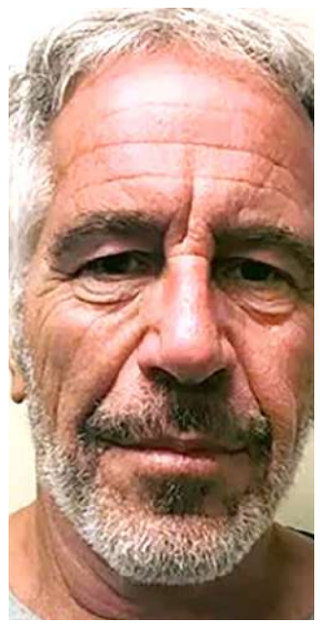
The rhetoric marks a dramatic escalation for the Republican President, who has broken with some of his most loyal backers on issues in the past, but never with such fervour. Though Trump cannot legally run for another term, he will need strong support from a united party to pass his remaining legislative agenda in a narrowly-divided Congress and an energised base to turn out in next year's midterm elections.

The schism centres on the Trump administration's handling of documents related to Epstein, who was found dead in his New York jail cell in August 2019, weeks after his arrest on sex trafficking charges. Last week, the Justice Department and the FBI acknowledged in a memo that Epstein did not maintain a "client list" to whom underage girls were trafficked. They also said no more files related to the investigation would be made public, despite past promises from Attorney General Pam Bondi that had raised the expectations of conservative influencers and conspiracy theorists.

The reversal sparked fury among Trump's most loyal defenders, who have turned on Bondi, in particular. But Trump has repeatedly said he maintains confidence in his attorney general and had instead chided those who continue to press the issue.

"I don't understand what the interest or what the fascination is," he said Tuesday, after unsuccessfully urging his "'boys' and, in some cases, gals'" to stop wasting "Time and Energy on Jeffrey Epstein, somebody that nobody cares about."

The reversal sparked fury among US President Trump's most loyal defenders, who have turned on Attorney General Pam Bondi, in particular ***PHOTO: PTI&X/@JEFFREY EPSTEIN***



In an Oval Office appearance Wednesday after the Truth post, Trump made clear that he was done with the story and said he had "lost a lot of faith in certain people".

He complained that Bondi has been "waylaid" over her handling of the case and has given out all "credible information" about the wealthy financier. "If she finds anymore credible information she'll give that, too," Trump said. "What more can she do than that?"

Trump and many figures in his administration, including FBI Director Kash Patel and his deputy, Dan Bongino, have spent years stoking dark and disproved conspiracy theories like those surrounding Epstein, including embracing QAnon-tinged propaganda that casts Trump as a saviour sent to demolish the "deep state".

Trump's comments have not been enough to quell those who are still demanding answers. Some of the podcasters and pro-Trump influencers who helped rally support for Trump in the 2024 campaign said Wednesday they were disappointed or puzzled by his comments.

Far-right conspiracy theorist and podcaster Alex Jones called Trump's handling of the Epstein situation "the biggest train wreck I've ever seen".

Benny Johnson, a conservative podcaster, said on his show that he is a fan of Trump's movement but is trying to "give tough love and speak on behalf of the base".

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La, in an interview on Benny Johnson's show Tuesday, had called for the Justice Department to "put everything out there and let the people decide".

His first-term national security adviser, retired Lt Gen Michael Flynn implored Trump in a lengthy message to correct course.

Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk on his podcast attempted some damage control on Trump's behalf.

"Don't take too seriously this whole Truth Social here," Kirk told his audience. "I know some people are getting fired up about this. I don't believe he was trying to insult anybody personally."

He also offered a message to Trump stating,"The grassroots is not trying to make you look bad." "We want to try and make sure the bad people that have done such terrible things to you can finally be held accountable." *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Cambodia cracks down on cyber crime, arrests 1K

PHNOM PENH, 17 JULY

Cambodia on Wednesday said that an order by Prime Minister Hun Manet to crackdown on criminal cybercrime operations in the country had resulted in the arrest of more than 1,000 suspects this week. "The government has observed that online scams are currently causing threats and insecurity in the world and the region. In Cambodia, foreign criminal groups have also infiltrated to engage in online scams," the PM's statement dated Tuesday read. The United Nations's recently published findings "point towards state complicity in abuses carried out by Chinese criminal gangs." The UN's report also said, "The Cambodian government is deliberately ignoring human rights abuses, including slavery, human trafficking, child labour and torture being carried out by criminal gangs on a vast scale."—*PTI*

7.3 quake hits Alaska, tsunami warning issued

JUNEAU, 17 JULY

A 7.3-magnitude earthquake struck off Alaska's coast at 12:37 local time (20:37 GMT) on Wednesday, the US Geological Survey reported. The epicentre lay 87 km south of Sand Point at a depth of 20.1 km. A tsunami warning was issued for South Alaska and the Alaska Peninsula, spanning Pacific coasts from Kennedy Entrance to Unimak Pass. The National Tsunami Warning Center confirmed a tsunami and warned of expected impacts. No warnings were issued beyond this region. Alaska, part of the Pacific Ring of Fire, experienced North America's strongest quake in 1964 (magnitude 9.2), which killed over 250. A 7.2-magnitude tremor also hit the peninsula in July 2023 without major damage. —*PTI*

Syria pulls back after ceasefire with Druze

Israel struck Syrian Defence Ministry HQ in the heart of Damascus to 'protect Druze minority'

DAMASCUS, 17 JULY

- The days-long fighting threatened to unravel Syria's postwar political transition and brought in further military intervention by its powerful neighbour Israel, which on Wednesday struck the Syrian Defence Ministry headquarters in the heart of Damascus. Israel said it was acting to protect the Druze religious minority

Syrian government forces largely withdrew from the southern province of Sweida on Thursday, following days of vicious clashes with militias of the Druze minority.

Under a ceasefire agreement reached the day before, which largely halted the hostilities, Druze factions and clerics have been appointed to maintain internal security in Sweida, Syria's interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa said in an address broadcast early Thursday.

The days-long fighting threatened to unravel Syria's postwar political transition and brought in further military intervention by its powerful neighbour Israel, which on Wednesday struck the Syrian Defence Ministry headquarters in the heart of Damascus. Israel said it was acting to protect the Druze religious minority.

Druze leaders and Syrian government officials reached a ceasefire deal mediated by the United States, Turkey and Arab countries.

Convoys of government forces started withdrawing from the city of Sweida overnight as Syrian state media said the withdrawal was in line with the ceasefire agreement and the military operation against the Druze factions had ended.

CHURCH HIT IN GAZA

Meanwhile on Thursday morning, airstrikes hit the Holy Family Church in northern Gaza, injuring several people including the parish priest, officials with the Catholic Church said.

Parish priest Fr Gabriel Romanelli was very close with late Pope Francis and the two spoke often during the war in Gaza. The church was damaged in the attack, officials said, in what witnesses said appeared to be an Israeli tank shelling. The Israeli military did not have immediate comment on the strike. —*PTI*

Druze people from Syria and Israel protest on the Israeli-Syrian border in Majdal Shams of the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

Trump hosts gulf leaders amid Syria violence

President Donald Trump greets Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa at the White House, Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

WASHINGTON, 17 JULY

President Donald Trump hosted Arab Gulf leaders at the White House on Wednesday amid renewed violence between Israel and Syria, casting doubt on his Middle East peace ambitions.

In the Oval Office, Trump met Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, while Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani joined him for a private dinner later. Trump has focused heavily on the Gulf, where his family maintains business interests. His recent regional tour included visits to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE.

During the meeting, Trump highlighted mutual cooperation: "Anything they needed, we helped them. And anything we needed, they helped us."

Bahrain, a key US ally and home to the US Fifth Fleet, pledged $17 billion in investments, including deals involving American aircraft, jet engines, and computer servers.

A new agreement on civilian nuclear cooperation was also signed, ahead of a planned visit by Bahrain's king later this year.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio described the conflict as a "misunderstanding" and expressed hope for de-escalation. —*PTI*

US Senate okays $9 billion in spending cuts

The US Senate has approved $9 billion in federal spending cuts requested by President Donald Trump, targeting public broadcasting and foreign aid. Passed 51–48, the bill now heads back to the House and must be signed by midnight Friday to take effect. Senators Lisa Murkowski and Susan Collins opposed the bill, citing rural service losses. —*PTI*

Mass protests against US Medicaid cut

Chicago, 17 July

Over 1,600 protests are planned nationwide on Thursday in response to President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown and cuts to Medicaid.

The 'Good Trouble Lives On' rallies, honouring civil rights icon John Lewis, will include vigils and marches in cities like Chicago, Atlanta, and Oakland. —*PTI*

Prosecutor on Epstein, Diddy cases fired

Washington, 17 July

The Justice Department has dismissed Maurene Comey, daughter of former FBI Director James Comey and a veteran federal prosecutor known for her work on high-profile cases involving Jeffrey Epstein and Sean "Diddy" Combs, according to three sources. No specific reason was given for her firing. —*PTI*

Trump spotted with injured ankles, hands

New Jersey, 14 July

Concerns over Trump's health emerged after photos showed him with visibly swollen ankles at the FIFA Club World Cup final at MetLife Stadium. Social media users also highlighted apparent bruising on his right hand during a press event. Critics accused the administration of concealing his true condition. —*Agencies*

NEW FACES ADDED

Zelenskyy revamps Cabinet to spur up battle readiness

KYIV, 17 JULY

A slate of fresh-faced officials is poised to take on top roles in Ukraine's government, as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reshuffles the Cabinet in a bid to energise a war-weary nation and boost domestic weapons production in the face of Russia's grinding invasion.

At home, however, the Cabinet recalibration has not been seen as a major shift, as the Ukrainian leader continues to rely on officials who have proven their effectiveness and loyalty during the war, which has now entered its fourth year.

Zelenskyy submitted a list of nominations on Thursday to reshuffle top government positions, including the replacement of Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, the longest-serving head of government in Ukraine's history. Draft resolutions were registered in parliament proposing Yuliia Svyrydenko, currently the first deputy prime minister and minister of economy, as the new prime minister, and Shmyhal as defence minister, according to the parliamentary website.

Other changes are expected in the Cabinet, but Svyrydenko's nomination as prime minister is taking centre stage.She played a key role in negotiating a US–Ukraine mineral agreement, ensuring the terms were acceptable to Kyiv. Svyrydenko has frequently represented Ukraine in high-level talks with Western partners, focusing on defence cooperation, economic recovery and reconstruction. Lawmakers and fellow officials describe her as a diligent executive with a reputation for loyalty to the presidential office. —*PTI*

Blaze kills 61 at mall in Iraqi city

BAGHDAD, 17 JULY

A fire at a newly opened mall in eastern Iraq's Wasit province killed more than 61 people, including women and children, Iraqi officials said Thursday.

Iraq's Interior Ministry said in a statement that 61 people died, most of them from suffocation, in the fire that broke out late on Wednesday in the city of Kut. Among the dead were 14 charred bodies that remain unidentified, it said.

Civil defence teams were able to rescue more than 45 people who were trapped inside the building, the statement said.

The mall, which had opened only a week earlier, was in a five-story building that also contained a restaurant and supermarket.

The cause of the fire was not immediately known, but the governor said initial reports from an investigation would be announced within 48 hours PHOTO: X@MIDEASTOB

The state-run Iraqi News Agency reported that people remained missing. Photographs and videos on local media showed the building fully engulfed in flames.

Provincial Gov Mohammed al-Mayyeh in a statement declared three days of mourning. He said the cause of the fire is under investigation but that legal cases were filed against the building owner and mall owner. He did not specify what the charges were.

"We assure the families of the innocent victims that we will not be lenient with those who were directly or indirectly responsible for this incident," al-Mayyeh said.

The results of the preliminary investigation will be released within 48 hours, he said. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammad Shia al-Sudani said in a statement that he had directed the interior minister to go to the site of the fire to investigate and take measures to prevent a recurrence. —*PTI*

PANDA DIPLOMACY

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese capped off a landmark China state visit by meeting giant panda Fu Ni in Chengdu, symbolising warming ties after years of diplomatic tension. The visit underscored shared support for fair trade amid rising US tariffs. All major trade barriers have now been lifted, marking a shift in Australia's global trade strategy and a cooling of ties with the US PHOTO: PTI

Baloch insurgents ambush Pak military bus, kill 29

KARACHI, 17 JULY

The security situation in Balochistan, which is already volatile, escalated this week after two banned separatist groups — the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) and the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) — claimed responsibility for multiple deadly attacks on Pakistani military convoys on 15-16 July.

The attacks were carried out in convoys across Kalat, Jhau, and Quetta areas of Balochistan, leaving dozens of soldiers dead according to reports.

The BLA claimed responsibility for the targeted attack on a military transport bus in Kalat and killing at least 27 troops and injuring several others. It also claimed responsibility for another incident using IED, in which a soldier was killed.

Likewise, BLF also took responsibility for two different attacks - an IED blast in Kalat's Khazina that killed four soldiers, and killing six on 16 July after ambushing a military unit in Awaran's Fujro Kor. In the last attack, a senior officer, Major Syed Rab Nawaz Tariq from Muzaffarabad – was also reportedly killed.

While the Pakistani Army acknowledged "encounters with militants," the Pakistan Army has not publicly confirmed the exact number of deaths due to the insurgent groups' attacks. It, however, confirmed retalitating to the attacks and killing a few terrorists in return. — *Agencies*

SCHOOLBAGS FOUND

65 skeletal remains unearthed from Sri Lankan mass grave

COLOMBO, 17 JULY

The skeletal remains of a girl aged between four and five years have been identified among 65 sets of human remains exhumed from a mass grave, which first came into focus during the LTTE conflict in the mid-1990s, in Sri Lanka's Jaffna district.

"The findings of the excavation at the Chemmani mass grave were reported to the Jaffna Magistrate's Court on 15 July by Raj Somadeva, a forensic archaeologist overseeing the exhumation," Jeganathan Tathparan, a lawyer, told PTI on Thursday.

Tathparan said that the remains of a girl child were found alongside school bags and toys. Two additional skeletons found in the mass grave are also suspected to be children's.

The Chemmani site first drew international attention in 1998 when a Sri Lankan soldier testified about the existence of mass graves PHOTO: BBC

The Chemmani site first drew international attention in 1998 when a Sri Lankan soldier testified about the existence of mass graves with hundreds of civilians allegedly killed during the conflict between LTTE and the overnment.

An excavation in 1999 uncovered 15 skeletons, but no action was taken until the recent findings. Thousands died and disappeared during the 26-year-long civil war, which ended in 2009. —*PTI*

14 held for clashes in B'desh town

DHAKA, 17 JULY

At least 14 people have been arrested following clashes in Gopalganj, Bangladesh's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's hometown, in which four were killed, prompting a curfew, according to a media report on Thursday.

Four people were killed in clashes over a rally organised by the National Citizen Party (NCP) on Wednesday in Gopalganj, which turned into a virtual battlefield. Four extra platoons (nearly 200 soldiers) of the paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh were rushed to Gopalganj following the clashes on Wednesday.

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' office said a 22-hour curfew has been ordered from 8 pm Wednesday for Gopalganj, adding the perpetrators of the attack on the NCP would not go unpunished.

According to media reports and witnesses, the protesters, equipped with bamboo sticks and brickbats, clashed with police and security forces, including the army and paramilitary BGB.

Supporters of the ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina clash with the police at Gopalganj in Bangladesh on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

Cops' vehicles vandalised

Protesters vandalised the vehicles of police and that of the local administrative chief, alongside launching an assault on the NCP convoy, according to reports.

The NCP managed to proceed with the rally on the vandalised stage with broken sound systems, chaired by its convenor Nahid Islam.

In February, thousands of protesters set fire to the residence of Rahman, also known as Bangabandhu, which was converted into a memorial. —*PTI*

Rains kill 30 in Pak's Punjab

LAHORE, 17 JULY

Torrential monsoon rains claimed 30 lives in Pakistan's Punjab over the last 24 hours, prompting the provincial government to declare "rain emergency" in different parts, officials said on Thursday.

The most affected area was Chakwal, a salt range area of the province, some 300km from Lahore, receiving 423 mm of rain in the last 24 hours leading to floods in the area, the authorities said.

"A rescue operation is underway in Chakwal to evacuate people trapped by flash floods, with support from the military and local administration," the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) said in a statement here.

The monsoon rainfall is expected to continue across the province on Thursday as well and the authorities have issued an alert for possible flooding in rivers and streams across Punjab. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

AI race: Zoho launches own large language model

BENGALURU, 17 JULY

Homegrown technology company Zoho on Thursday announced its proprietary large language model (LLM) designed for enterprises using its suite of products, the latest move reflecting bold ambitions of Indian firms to build and innovate on their own AI stacks in the global tech race.

Zoho said it is also rolling out automatic speech recognition models for speech-to-text conversion in English and Hindi. The Chennai-headquartered company plans to further expand the available languages, beginning with other Indian and European languages. Zoho top management said it has not seen these AI advances impact jobs and hirings. It said the company grew 32 per cent in 2024 in India, its second largest market globally. *—PTI*

Rupee declines by 15P, closes at 86.07 against USD

MUMBAI, 17 JULY

The rupee declined 15 paise to settle at 86.07 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid a stronger greenback, outflow of foreign funds and volatile global crude oil prices.

Selling trend in the domestic equity markets and uncertainties over the outcome of the ongoing India-US trade talks further pressured the rupee, according to forex traders. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.93 against the US dollar and traded in the range of 85.80-86.09 during the day before settling at 86.07 (provisional), down 15 from its previous close. The rupee had declined 16 paise against the US dollar to close at 85.92 on Wednesday. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, rose 0.25 per cent to 98.63. *—PTI*

PGIM India appoints Abhishek Tiwari as CEO

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

PGIM India Asset Management has announced the appointment of Abhishek Tiwari as its new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), effective from 1 September 2025. Tiwari takes over the role from Ajit Menon, who has been CEO for the past seven years and will transition to the position of Senior Advisor, providing strategic guidance to the firm. With over seven years of experience at PGIM India AMC, Tiwari most recently held the position of Chief Business Officer. David Chang, Vice Chairman Asia, Global Wealth at PGIM, praised Tiwari's extensive knowledge of the business and his innovative vision as key factors for his suitability to lead the organisation into its next chapter. *—PTI*

Kalpataru Projects Int'l secures orders worth ₹2.2K crore

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Kalpataru Projects International Ltd (KPIL) has announced the acquisition of new orders valued at approximately Rs 2,293 crore, including projects in the Buildings and Factories sector in India and Power Transmission and Distribution initiatives overseas. The company, a leading Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) player, stated that these significant wins enhance their order book and market position. Manish Mohnot, MD & CEO of KPIL, commented, "With these new orders, our order intake for FY26 has reached Rs 9,443 crores, providing us with strong visibility for future growth." KPIL operates in over 30 countries and has a global presence in 75 countries, focusing on various sectors including urban mobility and water supply. *—PTI*

US curbs on Russian oil won't hurt India: Puri

US has threatened tariffs on countries buying Russian oil

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

India on Thursday played down the threat of the US imposing sanctions on countries buying Russian oil, saying it is confident of meeting its needs from alternative sources.

Oil Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said the world's third largest oil importer should be able to deal with any problems with Russian imports by seeking supplies from other countries. India imports more than 85 per cent of its requirement of crude oil, which is turned into fuels like petrol and diesel in refineries.

Traditionally, the Middle East was the main source, but Russia has been the mainstay supplier for nearly three years now.

After much of the West shunned Russian crude following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Russia began offering steep discounts to attract alternative buyers.

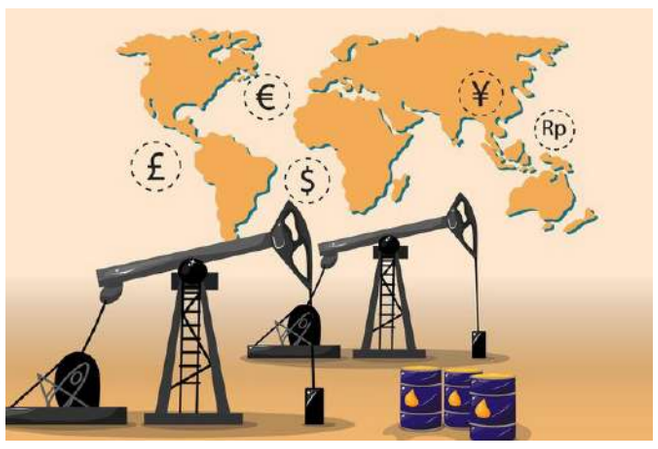


PHOTO: FREEPIK

Indian refiners seized the opportunity, turning Russia, once a marginal supplier, into India's largest source of crude oil, overtaking traditional suppliers from West Asia. Russia now accounts for as much as 40 per cent of India's oil imports.

Speaking at the Urja Varta annual conference of the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH), Puri said there are many new suppliers coming onto the market such as Guyana and supplies can also be ramped up from existing producers such as Brazil and Canada.

"I don't feel any pressure in my mind. India has diversified the sources of supply," he said in reply to a question on the impact of the US threatening Russia with sanctions.

- India imports over 85 per cent of its requirement of crude oil, which is turned into fuels like petrol and diesel in refineries. The Middle East was the main source, but Russia has been the mainstay supplier for nearly three years now

Earlier this week, US President Donald Trump had threatened that countries purchasing Russian exports could face sanctions or steep tariffs if Moscow fails to reach a peace agreement with Ukraine within 50 days.

Puri said India is also increasing the hunt for finding new deposits of oil within the country and quickly bringing them to production. *—PTI*

SHIFTING FOCUS

Adani sells 20% stake in AWL for ₹7,150 crore

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Adani Group has sold a 20 per cent stake in AWL Agri Business Ltd, formerly known as Adani Wilmar Ltd, to Wilmar International, Singapore, for Rs 7,150 crore, according to a stock exchange filing.

Adani had in December announced divestment of its entire 44 per cent stake in Adani Wilmar in order to sharpen its focus on core infrastructure businesses.

Adani Commodities LLP (ACL), subsidiary of Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL), and Lence Pte Ltd, subsidiary of Wilmar International, Singapore entered into an agreement. They gave each other the option to buy or sell AEL/ACL's shares in AWL (Adani Wilmar Limited) later, at a price they both agree on - but not more than Rs 305 per share. The two together held around 88 per cent in the company.

In January 2025, AEL/ACL sold 13.5 per cent of its shareholding in AWL at Rs 276.51 per share. This was done so that more of the company's shares are owned by the public, as required by minimum public shareholding requirements. After this sale, ACL/AEL owned about 30.42 per cent of AWL.

Now, Adani Group has sold a 20 per cent stake in AWL Agri Business to Singapore-based Wilmar International at Rs 275 per share in a Rs 7,150 crore deal.

The stake sale is part of Adani Group's plan to exit the FMCG business. *—PTI*

SEBI flags concerns over derivatives frenzy

KOLKATA, 17 JULY

SEBI on Thursday expressed concern over the growing dominance of ultra-short-term derivatives trading, cautioning that such trends could undermine the health of India's capital markets, while contemplating steps to extend the tenure and maturity of these products.

"This is an imbalance that is unhealthy and may have potential for adverse consequences," said SEBI Whole-Time Member Ananth Narayan, addressing the Capital Markets Conclave organised by the CII.

"We must look for ways to further deepen our cash equities markets, even as we look to improve the quality of our derivatives market by extending the tenure and maturity of the products and solutions on offer. We need constructive engagement from all stakeholders to achieve this," he said.

Citing the market regulator's research, Narayan pointed out that 91 per cent of individual traders in Futures and Options (F&O) incurred net losses in FY25, collectively losing over Rs 1 lakh crore, funds that could otherwise contribute to responsible investing and capital formation. He highlighted that the Indian derivatives market is unique, with expiry-day index option turnover often exceeding the cash market by as much as 350 times.

SEBI has already introduced regulatory measures in October 2024 and May 2025 aimed at curbing excesses in this space, which Narayan said are showing some early signs of moderation. *—PTI*

Gold declines by ₹200 to ₹98,670 per 10g

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Gold prices fell by Rs 200 to Rs 98,670 per 10g in the national capital on Thursday due to unabated selling by stockists amid subdued demand trend in the overseas markets, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity went lower by Rs 500 to close at Rs 98,870 per 10g on Wednesday. Meanwhile, gold of 99.5 per cent purity declined by Rs 200 to Rs 98,200 per 10g (inclusive of all taxes) on Thursday. It had finished at Rs 98,400 per 10g in the previous market close. Spot gold fell by USD 21.55 or 0.64 per cent to USD 3,326.05 per ounce.

According to a report by World Gold Council said that gold is likely to remain 'range-bound' in the second half of this year, 0-5 per cent higher than current levels, considering the current market consensus. Current market consensus suggests that the global GDP will move sideways and remain below trend in the second half. *—Agencies*

Markets close lower on fourth day

MUMBAI, 17 JULY

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty settled lower on Thursday following selling in IT and banking shares and investors remaining in a wait-and-watch mode ahead of the outcome of the US-India trade talks.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 375.24 points or 0.45 per cent to settle at 82,259.24. During the day, it fell by 415.21 points or 0.50 per cent to 82,219.27.

The 50-share NSE Nifty closed lower by 100.60 points or 0.40 per cent to 25,111.45.

Fresh foreign fund outflows and subdued quarterly earnings dented investors' sentiment, experts said.

Among Sensex firms, Tech Mahindra declined nearly 3 per cent after its June quarter earnings failed to cheer investors.

IT services firm Tech Mahindra reported a nearly 34 per cent year-on-year increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 1,140.6 crore for the quarter ending 30 June, 2025, on the back of growth in communications and financial services verticals.

Infosys, HCL Tech, Eternal, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consultancy Services and Axis Bank were also among the laggards.

However, Tata Steel, Trent, Titan and Tata Motors were among the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,858.15 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.30 per cent and midcap index went up by 0.07 per cent. *—PTI*

Nifty 50 may touch 29K by Dec: Report

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Markets are in for a boost, with the Nifty 50 index expected to touch a new all-time high of 28,957 by December if a bull run returns, said a report released by PL Capital.

The Nifty 50 index had previously hit an all-time high of 26,277.35 in September 2024.

The report has laid out three scenarios revising its earlier targets for the Nifty 50, depending on market conditions. In the base case, the Nifty is valued at a 2.5 per cent discount to its 15-year average price-to-earnings ratio of 18.5x. *—ANI*

SOUTH INDIAN BANK REPORTS 10% PROFIT INCREASE IN Q1

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

South Indian Bank has announced a 10 per cent rise in profit for the first quarter, reaching Rs 322 crore, compared to Rs 294 crore in the same quarter last fiscal year. The bank's total income also increased to Rs 2,984 crore from Rs 2,736 crore year-on-year. Interest income rose to Rs 2,362 crore, while operating profit surged to Rs 672 crore from Rs 508 crore a year earlier. The bank's asset quality improved with gross NPAs declining to 3.15 per cent of gross advances, down from 4.50 per cent a year ago. *—PTI*

TECH MAHINDRA SHARES DROP BY 2% AFTER Q1 PROFIT REPORT

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Shares of Tech Mahindra fell over 2 per cent on Thursday following the announcement of a sequential decline in net profit. The stock dropped to Rs 1,575 on the BSE and Rs 1,572.30 on the NSE. The IT services firm reported a nearly 34 per cent year-on-year increase in consolidated net profit, reaching Rs 1,140.6 crore for the quarter ending 30 June 2025, up from Rs 851.5 crore a year ago. Revenue from operations grew by 2.65 per cent to Rs 13,351.2 crore. However, sequentially, net profit saw a decline of 2.2 per cent. *—PTI*

Airtel, Perplexity partner to offer free 1yr Perplexity Pro subscription to 360M

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Bharti Airtel on Thursday signed a partnership with AI-powered answer engine Perplexity to provide a 12-month free subscription of Perplexity Pro to all its 360 million customers.

Perplexity is an AI-powered search and answer engine that offers real-time, accurate and deeply researched responses to users in a conversational language.

Perplexity Pro comes with enhanced capabilities for heavy users, which includes more daily Pro searches, access to advanced AI models and the ability to select specific models, deep research, image generation, file uploads and analysis, as well as Perplexity Labs that brings ideas to life.

"We're thrilled to announce a game-changing partnership with Perplexity, bringing their cutting-edge AI capabilities exclusively for Airtel customers," said Gopal Vittal, Vice Chairman & Managing Director, Bharti Airtel. *—ANI*

'India has strong aviation potential'

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

India's aviation sector holds significant untapped potential, with the country accounting for only around 4 per cent of global air traffic, despite representing nearly 18 per cent of the world's population, according to a recent report by Jefferies. While India is already the third-largest aviation market globally by passenger volume—behind only the United States and China—its per capita air travel remains low, indicating substantial room for growth.

The report highlights several positive trends, including rising incomes, rapid urbanisation, and increasing investments in aircraft fleets and airport infrastructure. These factors are expected to sustain high single-digit to low double-digit growth in the sector. India's air connectivity is improving, with more domestic routes and direct international connections being introduced. The sector faces a global aircraft shortage, high taxation on aviation turbine fuel, and limited maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities. *—ANI*

INDIA'S INFRA DRAG

Five-fold growth, but only 1 charging point for 235 EVs

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

India's electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure is growing rapidly, with the number of public EV charging stations registering a five-fold increase from FY22 to early FY25, according to a report by CareEdge Ratings.

The report stated that public EV charging stations (EVPCS) have grown significantly from just 5,151 in CY22 to 11,903 in CY23, and further to 25,202 by the end of FY24, reaching 26,367 in early FY25.

This marks a compound annual growth rate of about 72 per cent over the three-year period from FY22 to FY25.

The report stated the rapid growth has been led by strong initiatives from the central and state governments. The Indian government has significantly stepped up efforts to boost public charging infrastructure across the country.

- The public EV charging stations have grown significantly from just 5,151 in CY22 to 11,903 in CY23, and further to 25,202 by the end of FY24, reaching 26,367 in early FY25

The report said this growth reflects the government's strong commitment to encouraging the adoption of electric vehicles in the country.

Additionally, the Production Linked Incentive Scheme for battery manufacturing, along with duty exemptions on key minerals, is expected to reduce India's import dependency by up to 20 per cent by FY27. This is likely to make EVs more affordable and help lower the overall cost of ownership.

The report also mentioned a gap between the growth of EVs and the charging infrastructure. India has just one public charging station for every 235 electric vehicles on the road. This highlighted the need for continued and faster development of EV charging stations to keep pace with the increasing number of electric vehicles being sold in the country. *—ANI*

Smartworks Coworking Spaces shares cross 7%

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Shares of Smartworks Coworking Spaces Ltd debuted with a premium of over 7 per cent on Thursday, listing at Rs 436.10 on the BSE, compared to the issue price of Rs 407. The stock later climbed further to Rs 469, marking a rise of over 15 per cent. On the NSE, it opened at Rs 435.

The company's market capitalisation stood at approximately Rs 5,241 crore during morning trade. Its Rs 583-crore initial public offering (IPO) was subscribed 13.45 times by the close of bidding on Monday.

The price band for the offer was fixed at Rs 387– Rs 407 per share. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/@AR12RUSSELL

Andre Russell to retire from Int'l cricket

KINGSTON, 17 JULY

Flamboyant T20 freelancer Andre Russell will draw the curtains on a start-stop 15-year international career for the West Indies after the second T20I against Australia here on 22 July. Russell's most significant achievement is being a member of two T20 World Cup-winning West Indies teams in 2012 and 2016, respectively. Since 2019, Russell has featured exclusively in the T20 format. He has represented the West Indies in 84 T20Is, 56 ODIs, and one solitary Test. The 37-year-old Jamaican, a cornerstone of West Indies' T20 success, had been named in the squad for the five-match series against Australia but will play his final two international matches on July 20 and 22 at his beloved home ground the Sabina Park.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X/@SIMONEBILES

Simone Biles wins two ESPYS, beating out Stephen Curry

LOS ANGELES, 17 JULY

Simone Biles won two trophies at the ESPYS on Wednesday night, including the women's best athlete award. The 11-time Olympic medalist claimed the night's first award, best championship performance, for her efforts at the Paris Games. She won three golds and a silver while helping the U.S. women's gymnasts win their first team title since 2016. "That was very unexpected, especially in a category of all men," Biles said after kissing her husband, Chicago Bears safety Jonathan Owens.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

NRAI president Deo appointed Interim Chairperson of ISSF

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) President Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo has been appointed as the Interim Chairperson of the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) Committee on E-Sports, E-Games and technological innovations, the national federation announced on Thursday. The newly formed committee is a strategic initiative by the ISSF to explore and integrate emerging digital and technological trends such as virtual and augmented reality formats, e-shooting competitions, and innovations in judging and training technologies.—*PTI*

IOC consulted in drafting of Sports Bill: Mandaviya

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday said that the National Sports Governance Bill, which will be tabled in the Parliament during next week's monsoon session, has been drafted with inputs from not just the stakeholders here but also international bodies like the IOC and FIFA. Addressing the one-day 'Khelo Bharat Conclave', featuring representatives from the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), National Sports Federations (NSFs), the corporate world, and athletes, the minister reiterated his commitment to have the bill passed, for which he has even held discussions with former sports minister and Congress leader Ajay Maken.—*PTI*

Praggu forces Carlsen to resign, chess great stunned

LAS VEGAS, 17 JULY

India's Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa delivered a sensational victory over world No. 1 Magnus Carlsen at the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam Tour in Las Vegas. The 19-year-old outplayed the five-time world champion in just 39 moves. Norwegian Grandmaster Carlsen, who recently faced consecutive defeats at the hands of India's reigning world champion D Gukesh, suffered another setback as he was beaten by 19-year-old R Praggnanandhaa in Round 4 of the group stage at an ongoing tournament featuring a 10-minute plus 10-second increment time control. Praggnanandhaa, who has already won three tournaments this year, has now defeated Carlsen in all three formats: Classical, Rapid, and Blitz. The Indian prodigy now holds a joint lead in the eight-player Group White, with 4.5 points. "Magnus about to resign...and he does!" the commentator exclaimed after Praggnanandhaa's win. Praggnanandhaa began by playing out a draw against Abdusattorov with Black, followed by a win against Assaubayeva. In Round 3, he defeated Keymer despite holding Black pieces before stunning Carlsen.

However, Carlsen, the winner of the Freestyle Chess Grand Slam events in Paris and Karlsruhe and overall tour leader, has been knocked out of title contention in Las Vegas. After a turbulent day in the round-robin phase, Carlsen finished shared fourth place in his group and was eliminated in a playoff by Levon Aronian. He now dropped into the lower bracket, where he can finish no higher than third.

The tournament's first day, in the ballroom of the Wynn Las Vegas hotel, featured two eight-player round-robins the White Group and the Black Group with the top four from each advancing to the top bracket. The bottom four proceed to a placement bracket, fighting for final rankings and prize money, but no longer in contention for the Vegas title.

Carlsen opened with two wins but then hit a wall. Losses to Praggnanandhaa and Wesley So, along with two draws, left him needing a win in the final round just to force a tiebreak. He beat Bibisara Assaubayeva but then lost both playoff games to Aronian, who clinched the final qualifying spot. —*PTI*

R Praggnanandhaa and Magnus Carlsen PHOTO: PTI

Lakshya Sen, Satwik-Chirag exit JO

Lakshya lost to Japan's Kodai 19-21, 11-21

TOKYO, 17 JULY

Indian shuttlers continued to falter at the Japan Open with Lakshya Sen and the star men's doubles duo of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty bowing out in the second round of the Super 750 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

World No. 18 Lakshya's inconsistent run resulted in a 19-21, 11-21 loss to Japan's Kodai Naraoka in the men's singles that lasted close to an hour.

The 23-year-old, who had looked promising in the opener with a commanding 21-11, 21-18 win over China's Wang Zheng Xing, failed to carry the momentum forward.

In the men's doubles, Satwik and Chirag were handed a 22-24, 14-21 defeat by the fifth-seeded Chinese combine of Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang in a battle between former world No. 1 pairs.

With this win, Paris Olympics silver medallists Wei Keng and Wang Chang extended their head-to-head lead over the Indians to 7-2.

Lakshya Sen, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, and Chirag Shetty PHOTO: PTI

After a slow start, the Indian pair did well to take an 18-14 lead but couldn't hold on to the momentum as their Chinese counterparts sealed a thrilling first game.

The world number five Chinese duo continue in the same vein in the second game as Satwik and Chirag struggled with their smashes and defence to concede their fourth defeat in a row to Wei Ken and Chang. —*PTI*

1ST WODI

Deepti powers India to 4-wicket victory over England

SOUTHAMPTON, 17 JULY

Deepti Sharma showed enormous composure with an unbeaten half century that powered India to a comfortable four-wicket victory in the opening women's ODI against England here.

The dress rehearsals for India's 50-over World Cup started in earnest as a target of 259 was chased with 10 balls to spare, courtesy Deepti's unbeaten 62 off 64 balls with three boundaries and a six.

Her 90-run fifth-wicket stand in 14.2 overs with Jemimah Rodrigues (48 off 54 balls) proved to be the match-winning one. All-rounder Amanjot Kaur (20 off 14 balls) provided the finishing touches with some meaty blows as the target was achieved with minimum fuss despite India being reduced to 124 for 4 after the fall of skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's (17) wicket. Deepti and Rodrigues took over and farmed the strike well as they kept the scoreboard ticking and also hit the occasional boundaries whenever loose deliveries were provided.

Deepti, whose slog over batting has always come in for a lot of flak, was brilliant in planning the chase.

The shot of the match certainly was her one-handed six off Lauren Bell over deep mid-wicket. She effortlessly picked a length ball from outside the off-stump and dispatched it over deep mid-wicket with her bottom hand coming off the handle. Indian captain Harmanpreet was very happy with Deepti's performance and also praised Rodrigues, who missed out on a half-century by two runs. India 262 for 6 (Deepti 62*, Rodrigues 48, Dean 2-52) beat England 258 for 6 (Dunkley 83,Davidson-Richards 53, Rana 2-31) by four wickets. —*PTI*

Deepti Sharma

WC is still some time away: Deepti

Deepti Sharma feels that the Indian team is on the right track as far as preparations for the upcoming Women's ODI World Cup are concerned, but wants to focus on the ongoing England series as the marquee event is still two months away. Deepti scored a composed 62 not out in India's successful chase of 259 in the opening WODI against England on Wednesday. This is India's penultimate 50-over series, with one left at home against Australia starting September 14. The Women's ODI World Cup starts on September 30 with India taking on Sri Lanka.

YU ZIDI HEADS TO WORLD SWIMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS

SINGAPORE, 17 JULY

Yu Zidi of China is only 12 years old and will race at the world swimming championships later this month in Singapore.

That's amazing.But her age is only part of the picture.Not only is she very young, but her times in three events this year are among the best in the world. And here's the kicker. Those times would have been very close to medals in last year's Paris Olympics.

Again, she's 12. That's a sixth- or seventh-grade student, depending on the school system. Not yet a teenager."I think it's a great story. I don't know where it will lead," Greg Meehan, the national team director for the American squad in Singapore, told The Associated Press.

As promising young swimmers do, Yu is clocking personal bests almost every time she competes. Her PBs are more than just confidence boosters. —*PTI*

ANDERSON TENDULKAR TROPHY

There will be a leaning towards playing Bumrah: Doeschate

Ryan ten Doeschate and Jasprit Bumrah PHOTO: PTI

BECKENHAM, 17 JULY

India's assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate on Thursday said the team is "leaning towards" playing lead pacer Jasprit Bumrah in the fourth Test in Manchester since the series is on the line, but a final call will be taken close to the must-win game, starting 23 July.

Speaking after India's only training session in Beckenham after the Lord's heartbreak, Doeschate said many factors will influence the call on Bumrah's participation. "We'll make that call in Manchester. We know we've got him for one of the last two tests. I think it's pretty obvious the series is on the line now in Manchester, so there will be a leaning towards playing him," said Doeschate.

"But again, we've got to look at all the factors. How many days of cricket are we going to get up there? What do we feel is our best chance of winning that game? And then how that fits in together with the Oval and looking at the last two games holistically as part of the series." India will be reaching Manchester on 19 July.

England captain Ben Stokes took workload management out of the window and guided his team to a famous win at the iconic venue.

Left-arm pacer **Arshdeep Singh**, who is yet to play in the series, was bowling alongside Prasidh Krishna when he injured his bowling hand in an attempt to stop a ball that came in his way from Sai Sudharsan's bat. —*PTI*

Nair could be sole change

Cricket has given Karun Nair a 'second chance' but he doesn't seem to have made the most of it on the tour of England and could end up being the sole name on the chopping block when India's playing XI for the fourth Test is finalised. Back in the playing eleven after eight years, the 33-year-old has got starts in the majority of his six innings, but he has not been able to convert them into something substantial. He has looked good in the middle, especially while driving the ball, but the rising ball from length has bothered him.

Karun Nair

Sabalenka withdraws from Montreal tournament

MONTREAL, 17 JULY

Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka has withdrawn from the National Bank Open, opting for additional rest before beginning preparations for her US Open title defense. "I'm looking forward to kicking off the North American hard-court swing, but to give myself the best chance for success this season, I've decided it's in my best interest to skip Montreal," Sabalenka said Wednesday in a statement provided by the tournament. Sabalenka is coming off a semifinal appearance at Wimbledon, where she lost to Amanda Anisimova.

The National Bank Open begins July 27. Sabalenka could instead return for the Cincinnati Open in early August, with the first round of the US Open set to begin on 24 Aug. Sabalenka won that title for the first time in 2024. —*PTI*

India's Aditi Chauhan announces retirement

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Exactly a decade after becoming the first Indian woman to play professional football in Europe, the trailblazing Aditi Chauhan has decided to announce her retirement from the game after a career spanning 17 years.

The former India women's team goalkeeper, 32, now wants to work off the pitch and build a "stronger pathway and ecosystem" for the next generation."Thank you, football -- for shaping me, testing me, and carrying me through. After 17 unforgettable years, I'm retiring from professional football with deep gratitude and pride," Aditi wrote in a social media post on Thursday."This game gave me more than just a career; it gave me an identity. From chasing a dream in Delhi to carving out my path to the UK, where I pursued my Master's in Sports Management and played for West Ham United. —*PTI*

Aditi Chauhan

FIFA WC: Qatar, Saudi AFC qualifiers revealed

KUALA LUMPUR, 17 JULY

Saudi Arabia and Qatar drew home advantage in the fourth round of Asia qualifying for the 2026 World Cup on Thursday.

In October, Qatar will host Group A, which also contains the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

Saudi Arabia welcomes Iraq and Indonesia into Group B.

The winner of each round-robin group will take Asia's last two remaining automatic spots at next summer's tournament, to be hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The teams that finish second will then meet, with the winner progressing to inter-confederation playoffs, which are scheduled for March 2026.

Six teams from Asia secured qualification last month: Japan, Iran, South Korea, and Australia have all participated numerous times, while Jordan and Uzbekistan will make their first appearance. —*PTI*

MLS-RECORD STREAK

Messi's goal ends as Cincinnati beats Miami

NEW DELHI, 17 JULY

Lionel Messi's Major League Soccer-record streak of multi-goal games ended at five on Wednesday as his Inter Miami squad was blanked 3-0 at FC Cincinnati. The 38-year-old Argentine star forward had scored a brace, two goals, in five consecutive matches for Miami, giving him 16 goals on the season as Inter managed four wins and a draw in the run. Not since 2012 when he played for Barcelona had Messi netted a brace or more in five consecutive matches.

But Cincinnati kept Miami to only two shots on goal in the contest.

"Clearly today we were outplayed from the beginning of the match," Inter Miami head coach Javier Mascherano said through a translator.

"It was very difficult for us to win the individual duels. Maybe one of the reasons is that physically we come with a very big hustle and bustle and in the long run we end up paying.

"Leo suffered a knock at the end but it ended well."

US 20-year-old midfielder Gerardo Valenzuela opened the scoring for Cincinnati in the 16th minute. Brazilian striker Evander followed with a goal in the 50th minute and struck again in the 70th to provide all the scoring the hosts needed. "We didn't play the game we wanted. They put us under pressure all the time, we weren't fresh or lucid and they beat us very well," Mascherano said.

Miami fell to 11-4 with five drawn for 38 points, fifth in the Eastern Conference and eight points adrift of first-place Philadelphia, the overall MLS leader which beat Montreal to stay one point ahead of Cincinnati in the overall MLS standings.—*PTI*

Lionel Messi